

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (17) The Christian Life in Christ

In Colossians 2 we read of the believers union with Jesus Christ that brought them into a vital, living relationship with God through Him. Jesus Christ is the all-sufficient Savior and Lord of His people. In Christ all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily and all who are redeemed by Him experience their fullness in Him. His people are to view their identity and purpose in life in their union with Him. God had accomplished this blessed union for them when He had caused each of them to be born again. Their former lives had come to an end and their new life in Jesus Christ had begun. They had confessed this spiritual reality in their baptism, confessing that their former life was over and their new life in Christ was now before them. Therefore they were not to allow anyone or any teaching to take their sight and focus from Jesus Christ.

We now arrive to Colossians 3:1 and following. Here the apostle instructs His readers to live in a manner consistent with their new life in Jesus Christ. Let us begin with reading the first four verses in which this theme is set forth.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Now Colossians 3:1-4 is actually a continuation of what the apostle had just set forth in Colossians 2. There, after Paul had declared to them that their life was centered in Christ, he began to inform them on how they should therefore live. And so in Colossians 2:20 through 23 we read the question, "***If with Christ you died***" to the elemental spirits of the world, why, do you live as though you were still governed by the principles of the fallen world? And now in Colossians 3:1 we read the matter positively, "***If then you have been raised with Christ***, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." Our union with Christ instructs not only on how we are not to live, but it instructs us in the way that we are to live as Christians.

We might see 3:1ff in an outline that fits the larger context of the epistle¹:

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. The person and work of Christ (1:3-2:7)
- III. False teaching and its antidote (2:8-3:4)
 - 1. Christ is all--and all you need (2:8-15) a
 - 2. Therefore, guard your freedom (2:16-19)
 - 3. You died with Christ, therefore... (2:20-23)
 - 4. **You rose with Christ, therefore... (3:1-4)**

Now let us consider these first four verses of Colossians 3, which constitute one paragraph in our ESV. Again, here we read instruction to Christians whose relationship with God and with God's world has been radically and forever changed.

Verse one is a conditional sentence that opens with a conditional clause, "***If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.***" A

¹ We have used the outline from the commentary of F. F. Bruce on Colossians. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 174f.

conditional sentence will often begin its first clause beginning with the word “If” and the second clause beginning with the word “then” or “therefore.” Now we might read this and at first wonder if the matter is in doubt: “If you have been raised?” But in the Greek language of the New Testament there were different ways in which one could express very precisely the certainty of a conditional clause. Depending on the words used and the tense of the verb used, various degrees of certainty are conveyed. And so, sometimes the conditional sentence is worded which implies *the statement is contrary to fact*, the implied answer is “no”, or “it is not true.” An example of this would be when Martha said to our Lord regarding the death of her brother Lazarus. John 11:21 reads, “Then Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’” The wording of this conditional clause implies he was not there. It is as if she said, “‘Lord, if You had been here (but You were not here), my brother would not have died.’” But another form of the conditional sentence assumes that *the statement is true to fact*. An example of this would be when satan challenged our Lord in His wilderness temptation. Matthew 4:6 reads, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” The devil was not challenging our Lord whether or not He was truly the Son of God, for the manner in which the condition is set forth assumes it is a true condition. In other words, it was as if the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God (and indeed you are), throw Yourself down.” It was not a challenge questioning the identity of the Son of God. It was a challenge to our Lord to show forth that He was the Son of God by performing a miracle in order to impress His observers as to His identity. When a conditional sentence is expressed in this form, one could even use the word “since” rather than the word “if.”

Now the conditional clause of Colossians 3:1 is an example of this last form. The matter is not in doubt, but rather is assumed to be true. It is as if Paul wrote, “If then you have been raised with Christ (and indeed you have been raised with Him), seek the things that are above.” The matter of our having been raised with Christ is not in doubt. It is a true fact, and so, if this is true, and it is, therefore you ought to do what follows from that, “seek the things that are above.”²

Now what is meant by the expression, “Seek the things that are above”? First, recognize it is worded in the form of a command. If you have new life in Christ, if you have been raised with Him, then you are to seek the things that are above. Paul had set forth the spiritual reality, you are raised with Him. He then set forth the spiritual duty that flows from that spiritual reality: live in conformity to your high calling. **F. F. Bruce** set forth the matter quite clearly:

The Colossians knew that, like their fellow-Christians throughout the world, they had been “raised with Christ through faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead”; that they had been “quickened with Christ when they were spiritually dead” (Ch. 2:12f.). Every time that they recalled their baptism and its meaning, they ought to be impressed afresh with the reality of their participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, and draw the logical and practical conclusions. If their death with Christ severed the links that bound them to the old world order, which was trying to impose its dominion on them again, their resurrection with Christ established new links--links with a new and heavenly order, with the

² Actually in Greek there are four different forms in which a conditional clause or sentence can be expressed. The “First Class Condition” is a simple condition and is *assumed to be true*. An example is mentioned in the text, Matthew 4:6, which reads, “If You are the Son of God (and indeed you are), throw Yourself down.” The “Second Class Condition” is that which is looked upon as *contrary to fact, the condition is being set forth as not true*. An example is mentioned in the text, John 11:21, which reads, “Lord, if You had been here (but You were not here), my brother would not have died.” The “Third Class Condition” is a future more probable condition. Although it has not yet occurred, *it is assumed the condition will take place*. An example of this would be 1 John 2:1, “And if anyone sins (and he probably will), we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” The “Fourth Class Condition” is the future less probable condition. In this form the condition has not been determined, and *the condition is looked upon as unlikely to be fulfilled*. Although there are no true or complete fourth class condition sentences in the Greek New Testament, 1 Peter 3:14 is close. It reads, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake (and it is unlikely), you are blessed.”

spiritual kingdom in which Christ their Lord was sovereign, ruling from the place of supremacy to which He had been raised at God's right hand.³

Paul wrote, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, *seated at the right hand of God.*" This speaks of Jesus Christ as the enthroned King, the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the one with whom we have to do. Let us seek to learn what He would have us do. Let us seek to be conformed to His will.

What God has done for us in Christ is both the incentive and the argument for authentic Christian living. We are citizens of a realm that has opened before us, and we should live as its citizens while in this fallen world. The idea being conveyed is that we have become participants in a new world order; the promised age to come foretold in the Old Testament has been realized through Jesus Christ. God has raised His people in Christ Jesus. They possess the life of the resurrection in themselves. Therefore, they need not await for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in order to experience life in the eternal state, they have the power of the resurrection now. Christians have the ability, and therefore the responsibility, to experience in increasing degree the life now, that they will one day experience fully when they will be raised from the dead to And so, for Christians, "Let their union with the exalted Christ transform their entire life: mind, heart, and will."⁴ Again, **F. F. Bruce** stated it well:

But what are the implications of being raised with Christ? This, that believers have now no life of their own. Their life is the life of Christ, maintained in being by Him at God's right hand and shared by Him with all His people. Their interests must therefore be His interests. Instead of waiting until the last day to receive the resurrection-life, those who have been raised with Christ possess it here and now. The new creation--the "regeneration"--has already begun in them. Spiritually--that is to say, "in Christ"--they belong already to the age to come and enjoy its life.⁵

How do we obey this command, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God"? The answer is in **verse 2**, which reads, "*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*" Our way of life should be characterized by setting our minds upon what the will of God for us is in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior. We are to set our minds to view ourselves and the world through our lens of Jesus Christ enthroned in heaven. We are to ponder upon those things that we have in Jesus Christ. This knowledge of who we are in Christ should inform our way of assessing ourselves and the world in which we live.

This view of ourselves of having our minds fixed on the things that we have in Jesus Christ above, may be contrasted with those who are Christian in name only, but who are actually strangers to Jesus Christ. We read of this in **Philippians 3:12-20**, I which Paul wrote,

¹²Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

¹⁷Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—*who set their mind on earthly things.* ²⁰*For our citizenship is in heaven*, from which we

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 257f.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 140.

⁵ Bruce, p. 259.

also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²⁰ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

What is implied in this activity of setting our minds on things above, the result is that the things of this earth, that being our sin, will lose its appeal and power over our lives. And so, to the degree that we are successful in seeing life in this way, the sin that characterizes us will weaken in its power over us. It is as the hymn we sing,

O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's a light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!

Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion—
For more than conquerors we are!

His Word shall not fail you—He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Verse 3 gives a further explanation of this spiritual reality. ***“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*** This is not new information for he has already asserted this reality earlier. But he repeats the truth here to reinforce this as a foundational spiritual truth that governs how we may live as Christians in this fallen world. The emphasis here, however, is the assertion that our new life in Jesus Christ is secure for us. It is “hidden with Christ in God.” Our life in Christ is not always apparent to us and certainly not visible to others about us. But it is a spiritual reality and it is secure for us.

And then **verse 4** directs the Christian attention toward the day when our new life in Christ will be finally and fully experienced and enjoyed by us. ***“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”*** Jesus Christ Himself is our life. Probably few of us see the reality and significance that this has for us. But this is a spiritual reality for every true Christian, but the Holy Spirit is the only One who can make the reality evident to us. Here is a testimony of this very thing:

Bishop Moule tells of a friend of his to whom, “early in his course, those five words, ‘*Christ, who is our life*’, were made a new world.... As he walked back to his home over the dark fields from a mission-service he had been conducting, these simple, these familiar words passed through his soul in one of those moments of insight which God alone can explain. ‘Within ten paces, as I walked, life was transformed for me,’ he said; so wonderful was the discovery that the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely Rescuer, Friend, King, but Life itself, Life central, inexhaustible, ‘springing up within my heart, rising to eternity.’”⁶

⁶ Ibid, pp. 261f.

Christ is our life. We are to see Jesus Christ as the center and meaning of all we are as Christians. The Scriptures use this kind of idea or language in a number of places. Our Lord told His disciples, “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. *Because I live, you will live also*” (John 14:19). Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that *the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*” Galatians 4:19 reads, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again *until Christ is formed in you.*” And Paul expressed in Philippians 1:21, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” The life we live is the life that we have in Jesus Christ.

At this point the apostle Paul concludes the first portion of this epistle to the Colossians, which was primarily *doctrinal* in content. But with Colossians 3:5, the apostle begins the second division of his epistle, which is primarily very *practical* in its content. Beginning here Paul instructs these Christians to live according to the truths that he has set forth in the first two chapters that we have considered.

Let us bring forward again our outline:

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. The person and work of Christ (1:3-2:7)
- III. False teaching and its antidote (2:8-3:4)
 - 1. Christ is all--and all you need (2:8-15) a
 - 2. Therefore, guard your freedom (2:16-19)
 - 3. You died with Christ, therefore... (2:20-23)
 - 4. You rose with Christ, therefore... (3:1-4)
- IV. **The Christian Life in Christ (3:5-4:6)**
 - 1. **“Put off” (3:5-11)**
 - 2. **“Put on” (3:12-17)**
 - 3. **“Be subject” (3:18-4:1)**
 - 4. **“Watch and Pray” (4:2-6)**

I would like us to read the entire passage in context so that we are able to derive the impact of the all of these practical instructions in Christian living. This is how the epistle would have been read when the church at Colossae had first received this epistle.

⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

¹²Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²²Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. ^{4:1}Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

²Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—⁴that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

IV. The Christian Life in Christ (3:5-4:6)

Before us are a number of very practical and straightforward commands that address specific sins that need to be forsaken by Christians. This is the way unto Christian maturity. Maturity would not result from esoteric communications from astral powers, as the Colossian Christians were being instructed by the false teachers. **The Reformation Study Bible** footnote states the matter well:

The route to maturity is not the path of secret revelations, or of self-punishing disciplines. It consists in understanding and living on the basis of the believer's death (2:20; 3:5), resurrection, and heavenly enthronement "with Christ" (3:1). The Colossians have a false notion of heavenly reality, which ironically leads them to fruitless efforts on the earthly plane. Fruitful living on earth begins, rather, with right understanding of heavenly reality.⁷

1. "Put off" (3:5-11)

Again, **verse 5** reads, "*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*" Paul instructs these Christians to "put to death" these sins. The KJV is perhaps more rhetorical, which reads, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

"To put to death" means that we are to remove these sins from us. We are to repent of these and see to it that they are no longer practiced by us.

The apostle exhorts the Colossians to the mortification of sin, the great hindrance to seeking the things which are above. Since it is our duty to set our affections upon heavenly things, it is our duty to mortify our *members which are upon the earth*, and which naturally incline us to the things of the world: "Mortify them, that is, subdue the vicious habits of mind which prevailed in your Gentile state. Kill them, suppress them, as you do weeds or vermin which spread and destroy all about them, or as you kill an enemy who fights against you and wounds you."⁸

The New King James Version (and the KJV) is more faithful to the Greek text. It reads "Therefore put to death *your members* which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Perhaps the ESV translated it the way it did in order to avoid a "difficulty" in translation. For how is that these sins can be called our "members"? Are not our "members" physical

⁷ Note on 3:1-4:6, see R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 2126.

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 762.t

parts of us, our eyes, hands, feet? How can these sins be called our “members” and not our vices? Calvin proposed the idea that these sins are referred to as our “members” because these sins become so much a part of us when we commit them.

He makes mention of certain vices which he calls, not with strict accuracy, but at the same time elegantly, *members*. For he conceives of our nature as being, as it were, a mass made up of different vices. They are, therefore, our *members*, inasmuch as they in a manner stick close to us. He calls them also *earthly*, alluding to what he had said — *not the things that are on earth*, (Colossians 3:2,) but in a different sense. “I have admonished you, that earthly things are to be disregarded: you must, however, make it your aim to mortify those vices which detain you on the earth.” He intimates, however, that we are earthly, so long as the vices of our flesh are vigorous in us, and that we are made heavenly by the renewing of the Spirit.⁹

This idea of Christians needing to put to death is somewhat of a paradox. The Scriptures had very clearly taught us earlier in the epistle that *we had already died* in our union with Jesus Christ. But here we are told to “*put to death*” these sins. The spiritual reality is that we died with Christ. The practical reality is that we still have sins that we must deal with, that we must “put to death.” Paul is calling upon these Christians “to become in practice what they are in principle: dead to sin and alive to God.”¹⁰

There are five sins listed in verse 5. The first four are sexual sins. The fifth is the sin of covetousness. Later in verse 8 he identifies five more sins, which concern anger and abusive speech. There are ten sins listed all together.

He first four sins that are to be mortified, or put to death, are *sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire*. The first speaks of evil deeds done. They stem from the “evil desires” that a person has, which are driven by a person given over to “passion” and “impurity.”

Take note that these sins that Paul declared are to be put to death by the Christian are not only those sins which are outwardly committed, but they include inward sinful thoughts as well. New Testament Christianity is transformative from the heart, not just a change of outward behavior. Our Lord taught His disciples that this was essential to the nature of true salvation. He said,

¹⁷“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.
¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:17-20)

Our Lord was not speaking here of the righteousness of justification, which God gives as a gift through faith alone in Jesus Christ. The imputed righteousness of justification certainly exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees. Rather, He was speaking of practical righteousness, the righteousness of the law, that must be evident in the life of those who will be saved in the Day of Judgment. The righteousness of the true Christian must be greater than the righteousness of the Pharisees, for theirs was only an outward conformity to the law. The righteousness of the true Christian is internal as well as outward conformity. And in Paul’s instructions here to put to death desires, he is addressing not only outward conformity, but a moving toward inward conformity to the law of God inwardly, the righteousness that the Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit is able to enable His people to experience.

⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. 21 (Baker, 1993), p. 208.

¹⁰ Sproul, R. C., *The Reformation Study Bible*, p. 2126.

He mentions *covetousness* as the fifth sin, which he equated with idolatry. Covetousness is the desire to have more than what God has righteously given to you. It is the failure of being content with what God has not given you. Covetousness is the inordinate desire for something different or more than what God has provided. A covetous man will be an ungrateful man, for he is not content with His Lord's provision. He is as those Israelites who complained against the provision of the Lord in the wilderness and were subsequently judged by the Lord.

In **verse 6** Paul states why these things must be forsaken. "***On account of these the wrath of God is coming.***" The verb Paul used is present tense. This is sometimes referred to as a "prophetic present tense." The reason the present tense is used is to show that the wrath of God is so certain of coming due to people committing these sins, that is as if that wrath had already arrived.¹¹ If we are Christians, we will deal with these, for we know that God's wrath is upon all who practice such things. This is what Paul had declared in Romans 2:

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Paul wrote of these matters to the church at Ephesus:

³But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, ***let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints***; ⁴neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵For this you know, that ***no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*** ⁶***Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*** ⁷***Therefore do not be partakers with them.*** ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Eph. 5:3-8)

Now these Christians need to put to death these sins, for they were still troubled by them. Paul acknowledged this in **verse 7**, "***In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.***" They were once living in them, but they had become Christians. But these sins still troubled them being committed occasionally by them. They must put a stop to this behavior.

And then in **verse 8** Paul set forth the other sins for which they needed to mortify. "***But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.***" The Christian should be different from non-Christians in the manner that they speak to others. The first three sins listed speak to attitudes of the heart. The last two are sins of speech, which are the expressions of the first three sins. If we are characterized by anger, wrath, and malice, wishing ill of people, we need to put these to death. They should not be seen or heard coming forth from a Christian. Indeed they cannot be. A true Christian must put these sins away from him.

A true Christian may be known by his speech. In fact, it will be a vital aspect of the judgment that each of us will undergo when the Lord returns. For not only will our actions be judged, but our speech also. And our Lord warned His disciples about this matter. He said that a man's speech will reveal what kind of man he is, whether he is of God or of the devil.

³³"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. ³⁶But I say to you that for

¹¹ Hendriksen, p. 147.

every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matt. 12:33-37)

One important source of evidence for our claim to be Christian that will be examined on the Day of Judgment will be the words that we have spoken.

James wrote of the incongruence of a Christian speaking evil.

⁵Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh. ¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. (James 3:5-15)

We next read **verses 9 and 10**: ***“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”*** Again, a person’s speech is the issue. Lying is not to be done by the Christian. Why? For you had denounced and turned away from that “old self”, that person you were before your conversion and baptism. You had confessed and shown forth your new life that the Lord had created in you. And now you are attempting to become like Him, like Your Savior, who had redeemed you from your sin.

Paul concludes by setting forth the levelling effect of the death of Jesus Christ to redeem His people. He renders them all as His won with no distinction between them any longer, for they are in Christ who “is all and in all.” **Verse 11** reads, ***“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”***

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20-21)
