

REFLECTION GUIDE

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 | GROWING UP IN CHRIST

KEY TERMS

Right hand of God - In ancient culture, the right hand signified the place of honor and prominence (e.g. 1 Kgs 2:19). This language of sitting at the *right hand of God* (v. 1) comes from Ps 110:1 and is used of Jesus' position throughout the NT (e.g. Acts 2:33-34, Heb 1:3, & Ro 8:34).

Hidden with Christ - The concept of being *hidden* with Christ is only found here in Col 3. Paul's point may have two nuances. First, Christians have a real heavenly identity at present, but it is *hidden* because it will not be fully realized until Jesus returns. Second, the future hope of the Christian is secure because it is *hidden* safely with God.

Wrath of God - The *wrath of God* (v. 6) is a theme that runs throughout Scripture. In the Bible, God's wrath is not described as selfish or haphazard—in contrast to the pagan gods. Instead, God's wrath proceeds from his holiness and is a necessary response to that which violates his character or will.

BACKGROUND

Paul now begins to get practical about what it looks like to grow more like Christ. He writes, *If then you have been raised with Christ*—and the assumption is that the Colossians have—*seek the things that are above* (v. 1). Again Paul is calling the church away from mere earthly ideologies and towards Jesus who is *seated at the right hand of God* (v. 1). Paul's reason is that if someone is trusting Jesus, they have *died and [their] life is hidden with Christ in God. [And] When Christ...appears, then [they] also will appear with him in glory* (vv. 3-4). The point is that Christians have 1) given up their old life, 2) have a new life now, and 3) will experience the full glory of life with God when Christ returns. *Therefore*, Paul says (i.e. because of this) *put to death what is earthly in you* (v. 5). Paul goes on to describe, in verses 5 and 8, behaviors that are contrary to God's character and will for his people, and are thus sinful and not appropriate for a follower of Jesus. The word translated *earthly* in verse 5 doesn't mean that everything physical (i.e. "earthly") is bad and only the heavenly realm is good. The term literally means "members that are on earth" and seems to carry the same sense as Jesus' teaching in Matt 5:29-30 and 18:8-9 about rigorously fighting to get rid of areas of sin in one's life. Before moving on to what Christians ought to *put on* (v. 12), Paul also includes a specific exhortation not to *lie to one another* and he grounds this in the fact that the Church is a new community in which *there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free* (vv. 9-11). With Col 3:1-11, Paul reminds the church that they have a new life in Christ and ought to *put to death* everything contrary to that life.

GOING DEEPER

Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. What do these verses teach about how someone is saved? What do they teach about what ought to happen in a person's life after trusting in Jesus? Read Romans 8:13. What does this verse say about where the power to "put to death" sin comes from?

DID YOU KNOW?

Lists of vices (like v. 5 & 8) were common in the 1st century, but in the Greek world were designed for moral improvement and the benefit of society. In the NT, these lists are designed to lead people toward a life of flourishing in God's economy and away from God's judgment.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Colossians 3:1-17. What stands out to you? What contrasts are present?
2. Diving more deeply into verses 1-4, create a list of things these verses say about Jesus. Then, create a list of ways believers are identified with Jesus.
3. How does a new identity in Christ provide new motivation to seek things above?
4. What does it look like to “seek the things that are above” and to “set your minds on things that are above”? When you really *seek* or *set your mind* on something, how does that affect you?
5. The remainder of this passage calls believers to bring their attitudes and actions into congruence with the reality of who they already are in Christ through faith – putting off the old self and putting on the new self. Paul writes his letter this way because we need to embrace the gospel message of Colossians 1:1-3:4 before we feel the gospel mandates of Colossians 3:5-17. Why is it so important for us to *believe* our lives are hidden with Christ in God *before* we seek to modify our *behavior* for God?

LIVING THE WORD

6. In what ways are you tempted to feel insecure or unsettled in your relationship with God? Why do doubts sometimes persist?
7. How does the truth of verses 1-4 offer a counter-attack to potential doubts and insecurities?
8. How well are you personally *setting your mind on things above, not on things that are on earth*? How are your time, energy, money, thoughts, emotions involved in *seeking the things that are above, where Christ is*?
9. What is one way you want to live out this lesson in the week ahead?