

Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 12
Colossians 3:5-11 : Topic 6.2
"Clean up Your Life"

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Greek NT

5 Νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, πορνείαν ἀκαθαρσίαν πάθος ἐπιθυμίαν κακὴν, καὶ τὴν πλεονεξίαν, ἣτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία, 6 δι' ἧς ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ [ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας]. 7 ἐν οἷς καὶ ὑμεῖς περιεπατήσατέ ποτε, ὅτε ἐζήτε ἐν τούτοις· 8 νυνὶ δὲ ἀπόθεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς τὰ πάντα, ὀργὴν, θυμὸν, κακίαν, βλασφημίαν, αἰσχρολογίαν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν· 9 μὴ ψευδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ 10 καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν, 11 ὅπου οὐκ ἔστι Ἕλληνας καὶ Ἰουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

La Biblia
de las Américas

5 Por tanto, considerad los miembros de vuestro cuerpo terrenal como muertos a la fornicación, la impureza, las pasiones, los malos deseos y la avaricia, que es idolatría. 6 Pues la ira de Dios vendrá sobre los hijos de desobediencia por causa de estas cosas, 7 en las cuales vosotros también anduvisteis en otro tiempo cuando vivíais en ellas. 8 Pero ahora desechad también vosotros todas estas cosas: ira, enojo, malicia, maledicencia, lenguaje soez de vuestra boca. 9 No mintáis los unos a los otros, puesto que habéis desechado al viejo hombre con sus malos hábitos, 10 y os habéis vestido del nuevo hombre, el cual se va renovando hacia un verdadero conocimiento, conforme a la imagen de aquel que lo creó; 11 una renovación en la cual no hay distinción entre griego y judío, circunciso e incircunciso, bárbaro, escita, esclavo o libre, sino que Cristo es todo, y en todos.

NRSV

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8 But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

NLT

5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry. 6 God's terrible anger will come upon those who do such things. 7 You used to do them when your life was still part of this world. 8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. 9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

The Study of the Text:¹

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

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1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Col. 3:5-11 is the second pericope in the moral admonitions, the *paraenesis*, section of 3:1-4:6. The first passage, 3:1-4, laid out the foundational principle for Christian living with the admonition to focus one's attention on spiritual concerns coming out of the new spiritual life granted by God in conversion. A secondary emphasis was to not concern oneself with 'earthly things.' In 3:5-11, this point is picked up and expanded with a strong emphasis upon their pre-Christian life style and behavior. This life is no longer acceptable because believers have come to Christ, and conversion marks a radical break with one's past life. Pointedly the apostle underscores this applies no matter one's ethnic background.

Consequently, this passage calls us to serious consideration of the dramatic break with the old life before Christ, that God expects of those coming to Christ. Profound insight into the nature and demands of that break can be found in this text of Colossians.

The larger context -- to be treated in detail below under Literary Setting -- is the parallel nature of 3:5-11 with 3:12-17. The paraenesis in 3:5-11 moves believers away from the pre-Christian pattern of living, and the paraenesis in 3:12-17 moves believers into the positive qualities that replace the old life. Thus the motif of the BC / AD aspects of Christian experience are treated by these two texts, but from a Christian living rather than a spiritual existence perspective. This is highlighted by the core verbal expressions of Νεκρώσατε (put to death; v. 5), and the more directly opposites of ἀπόθεσθε (put off, v. 8) and Ἐνδύσασθε (put on, v. 12).

Historical Context:

The historical background for this passage does play an important role both externally and internally. Thus these aspects need to be examined as a part of the interpretive process.

External History. In the text apparatus of *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed, by United Bible Societies), only one variation of wording was considered significant enough for inclusion. In verse six, the very Hebrew sounding phrase ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας (upon the sons of disobedience) is omitted by some very early and important manuscripts.² Because of the rather evenly divided evidence both for and against inclusion, the editorial committee decided to include the phrase but enclose it in brackets in order to indicate the uncertainty over the inclusion or omission of the phrase.³

In the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.), the text apparatus lists nine places where variation of wording surfaces in comparing all existing manuscripts of this passage.⁴ As is clear from



²{C} ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας (see Eph 5:6) κ A C D¹ F G H I Ψ 075 0150 6 33 81 104 256 263 365 424 436 459 1175 1241 1319 1573 1739 1852 1881 1912 1962 2127 2200 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect it^{ar, d, f, g, mon, o} vg syr^{p, h} cop^{bo} arm eth geo slav Basil Chrysostom Theodore^{lat}; Pelagius Augustine // omit P⁴⁶ B D^{*vid} it^b syr^{pal} cop^{sa} Cyprian Ps-Cyprian Ambrosiaster Tyconius

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

³"It is exceedingly difficult to decide whether the words ἐπὶ ... ἀπειθείας were added in most witnesses by copyists who recollected Eph 5:6 (where no manuscript omits the words), or whether they are absent from P⁴⁶ B cop^{sa} eth^{ro} and several Fathers (Clement Cyprian Macrobius Ambrosiaster Ephraem Jerome) because of an accident in transmission. In view of (a) the very widespread testimony supporting the longer reading (κ A C D^{vid} F G H K L P almost all minuscules it vg syr^{p, h} cop^{bo} goth arm eth^{pp} Clement Chrysostom al) and (b) the inconcinnity produced by the shorter reading with the following ἐν οἷς, as well as (c) the impression that καὶ ὑμεῖς in ver. 7 assumes a previous mention of unbelieving Gentiles, a majority of the Committee decided to retain the words in the text but to enclose them within square brackets in order to indicate a measure of doubt as to their genuineness in Colossians."

Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 557.]

⁴Kolossar 3,5

* υμων κ² A C³ D F G H 075. 0278. 1881 M lat sy; Ir^{lat} (the insertion of the 2nd per pl pronoun, your)

| txt P⁴⁶ κ* B C* Ψ 33. 81. 945*. 1175. 1241s. 1739. 2464 pc M* vg^{mss}; Cl Or Epiph

* P⁴⁶ (the adjective κακήν is omitted by this manuscript)

Kolossar 3,6

* ὅ (C^{*vid}) D* F G vg^{mss} (the plural relative pronoun ἃ [which things] is replaced by the singular form ὃ [what])

| (δια) ταῦτα γὰρ P⁴⁶ sy^p (these two manuscripts replace δι' ἃ [because of which things] with διὰ ταῦτα γὰρ [for because of these things])

* † P⁴⁶ B b sa; Ambst (the inclusion or omission of the phrase ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας)

| txt κ A C D F G H I Ψ 075. 0278. 33. 1739. 1881 M lat sy bo (these mss include the phrase)

close examination of these variations, no significant shift in meaning takes place. Mostly these are attempts to update the style of the writing of the Greek, or else attempts to make this passage conform to other similar passages elsewhere in Paul's writings.

Consequently, we can exegete this passage with high level certainty that the adopted text reading represents the original wording of Paul's letter.

Internal History. The time / place markers in 3:5-11 are limited, largely because of the paraenetical nature of the passage. The time signals in the passage focus upon the prior conversion experience as foundational for present patterns of behavior. Allusions to the pre-conversion life style are contained in the text. The spatial markers are limited to the last declaration in verse eleven with the references to Greek, Jew, and Scythian, along with circumcised / uncircumcised, barbarian, slave / free. The social nature of these labels are significant background concerns for understanding more completely the point that Paul makes.

In the modern world, social distinctions based on race, language etc. exist, but tend to be discouraged in public expression. Most western countries have laws prohibiting discrimination in the workplace *et al.* Such did not exist in the ancient world. Social distinctions with strong public emphasis were deeply embedded into ancient society, and they played a major role in shaping attitudes and actions between various groups of people. Acceptance / rejection in society often revolved around one's race, language etc. In verse 11, Paul lists a series of racial and ethnic designations commonly found in that world: Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free. The first two sets -- Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised -- represent a Jewish perspective based upon religious values. Barbarian and Scythian reflect a Greco-Roman perspective based upon culture and education. These are not contrastive; instead, they stand over against Greek. Slave and free reflect those still under the social yoke of slavery and those who have found a way to purchase their freedom from slavery.⁵

One of the huge challenges to early Christians was the overcoming of these deeply held biases and prejudices. The idea of the commonality of humankind was not advocated in that world. Attitudes of superiority over everyone else were deep and pervasive. The foundation for such elitism could rest upon race, religion, education, as well as other reasons. Christianity's teaching of the commonality of humanity was revolutionary and posed great challenges for implementation in the daily life of the believing communities. Most of the controversies in the early church grew out of the struggles to take this principle seriously. Particularly difficult was the religious based racial prejudice of Jew against non-Jew or Gentile. The early church struggled all through the second half of the first century with this problem. This issue of discrimination remains one of the

Kolossar 3,7

* αυτοις D² (F) G 048. 1739. 1881 *M* lat syp (the demonstrative pronoun τούτοις [in these things] is replaced by the personal pronoun αυτοις [in them]).

| txt P⁴⁶ κ A B C D* H I P Ψ 075. 0278. 33. 81. 365. 1175. (1241^s). 1505. 2464 *pc*

Kolossar 3,8

* μη εκπορευεσθω F G it vg^{ms} co; Ambst (This verbal expression is added to the last vice listing: **do not let filthy speech come out of your mouth**)

Kolossar 3,11

* (G 3,28) αρσεν και θηλυ D* F G 629 it vg^s; Hil Ambr (these mss add 'male and female' to the listing in conformity to Gal. 3:28 list)

* και A D* F G 629 lat(t) syp; Hil (these mss add 'and' between δοϋλος, ελευθερος)

* † κ* A C 33. 81. 1241^s *pc*; Cl (these mss omit τα from the phrase τα παντα: **all things**)

| txt κ² B D F G Ψ 075. 0278. 1739. 1881 *M*

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 528.]

⁵For other examples of such listing see:

1 Cor. 12:13 (NRSV): "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—**Jews or Greeks, slaves or free**—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

και γαρ εν ενι πνευματι ημεις παντες εις εν σωμα εβαπτισθημεν, **ειτε Ιουδαιοι ειτε Έλληνες ειτε δοϋλοι ειτε ελευθεροι**, και παντες εν πνευμα εποτισθημεν.

Gal. 3:28 (NRSV): "There is no longer **Jew or Greek**, there is no longer **slave or free**, there is no longer **male and female**; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

ουκ ενι Ιουδαιος ουδε Έλλην, ουκ ενι δοϋλος ουδε ελευθερος, ουκ ενι αρσεν και θηλυ· παντες γαρ υμεις εις εστε εν Χριστω Ιησοϋ.

Rom. 1:14 (NRSV): "I am a debtor both **to Greeks and to barbarians**, both **to the wise and to the foolish**"

Έλλησιν τε και βαρβαροις, σοφοις τε και ανοητοις οφειλετης ειμι,

great challenges to Christianity even into our day. Thus Paul's words here and in the related passages stand as critically important words for us today.

Literary Aspects:

Here the literary aspects play a particularly important role in the interpretive process, especially with the introduction of some new literary forms.

Literary Form. At the **broad genre** level, we are dealing still with material in the letter body. The primary implication is that the material is 'occasional' in nature. Thus the topics and themes arose out of the perceived spiritual needs of the targeted readers initially. Paul's moral admonitions in 3:5-11 come from his understanding of the situation in the Lycus Valley as reported to him by Epaphras. The apostle did not issue blanket, or theoretical, admonitions detached from the needs of his initial readers.

At the **small genre** level, two issues come into the picture. First, the material is unquestionably *paraenesis*. The three admonitions clearly reflect exhortation to a specified life style that includes stated behavior. The first two, 'put to death' (Νεκρώσατε) and 'strip off' (ἀπόθεσθε), are expressed in the Aorist imperative Greek verb form, which specifies an intentional action with decisive impact. The readers are admonished to make a serious commitment to implement these two actions into their living. The third admonition, 'stop lying' (μὴ ψεύδεσθε), is a present imperative Greek verb that demands the cessation of a behavioral pattern that has been a part of their behavior up to this point. Paul is adamant that the Colossians take serious the responsibility to 'clean up' their behavior.

The next small genre issue is the introduction of two vice lists, which specify specific actions and attitudes that are to be avoided by the Colossians. Vice and virtue lists were common in ancient literature, both inside Christianity and Judaism, as well as the Greco-Roman culture.⁶ Over against the pattern in Judaism where

⁶Peter O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary*, pp. 178-182, has an invaluable summation of the issue of such lists in the ancient world:

A Note on the New Testament Ethical Lists

1. Background

Lists of virtues and vices meet us in the NT, particularly in the writings of Paul (Rom 1:29–32; 1 Cor 5:9–11; 6:9, 10; Gal 5:19–23; Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 4:3, etc). They were a common form among pagan moralists and, at least as far as the vices were concerned, in the antipagan polemic of Jewish propagandists. Some have argued that these lists in the NT were indebted to Jewish proselyte catechism as the church took over lists of ethical qualities required by its self-understanding as a neo-levitical community (so P. Carrington and G. Klein). This suggested origin has been challenged recently, particularly by those who have traced the genesis of such lists to Stoicism (Easton, *JBL* 51 [1932] 1; Vögtle *Lasterkataloge*) or to Iranian influences, mediated through sectarian Judaism, such as the Qumran community (Wibbing, *Lasterkataloge*). But Christian borrowing from Stoicism was limited; there is no Stoic parallel to Paul's identification of virtues with the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22, 23); the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, manliness, self-control, righteousness) and corresponding vices (folly, cowardice, intemperance, injustice) are not present in the NT catalogs (cf. Wibbing, *Lasterkataloge*, 86); and several of the so-called virtues in the NT lists were regarded as vices in Stoicism. So, for example, "humility" (ταπεινοφροσύνη) was a term of opprobrium in Greek thought (Grundmann, *TDNT* 8, 2), while in the Qumran literature (*1QS* 5:3, 4; cf. *1QS* 2:24; 4:3, 4; 5:25) and in Paul (cf. Phil 2:3; Col 3:12) it denoted the "practice of living together in community before God in such a way that other people are given a dignity and respect as they too are seen in God's sight ... The 'humility' of Christ becomes a model" (Martin, *NIDNTT* 3, 928).

Kamlah (*Form*) varied Wibbing's suggestion of an Iranian origin of the NT catalogs by distinguishing two forms, a "descriptive" catalog which closed with a promise of salvation and a threat of destruction (e.g. Gal 5:19–23), partly based on the *lex talionis*, "destruction to the destroyer" (cf. E. Käsemann, "Sentences of Holy Law in the New Testament." *New Testament Questions of Today*. Tr W.J. Montague [London: *SCM*, 1969] 66–81), and a "paraenetic" one, a putting off of the old life as a prelude to putting on the new (e.g. Col 2:20–3:17), which he traced to the Hellenistic syncretism of the mystery cults. However, Schroeder (*IDBSup*, 546) has argued against this on the ground that the NT lists manifest the ethical dualism of the OT particularly the apocalyptic promises and threats which contain lists of blessings and curses (Deut 27–30)—note the closing appeal: "See, I have set before you this day life and prosperity, death and destruction ... blessing and curses. Now choose life" (30:15, 19; cf. Jer 21:8; Ezek 18:5–9, 15–17).

Virtues and vices recur in the "Two Ways" scheme, found in *Didache* 1–5; Barn 18–20 and Hermes, *Man* 6:1; cf. Ignatius, *Magn.* 5; *2 Clem.* 4. It has been suggested that underlying this is the Jewish proselyte catechism with its way of light and way of darkness, governed by the spirits of truth and error (Test Levi 19:1; Test Judah 20:1; and especially *1QS*). The contrast of men walking in two ways is typically an OT one (Ps 1:6; 16:11; 119:33; Deut 5:33; 11:22; Josh 22:5; Prov 8:13; Jer 21:8; Zech 1:4; cf. Martin, *NIDNTT* 3, 929).

2. Characteristics of Paul's Ethical Lists

Several features of the Pauline catalogs are to be noted: (a) it is evident that considerable variety exists in both their form and content. No hypothetical original list appears to have existed (Easton, *JBL* 51 [1932] 7); there is too much variety, not only in the number of items but also in their sequence, to suggest there were fixed general rules for their logical construction (Wibbing,

these become ‘laws’ to be rigidly enforced as prohibited activity, Paul puts these concepts before the Colossians as typifying their pre-Christian pagan life, and thus are to be avoided now that they have come to Christ. Such behavior and attitude strictly has no proper place among believers in Christ. Continued practice of such will reflect continued paganism, and failure to have genuinely come to Christ. They become sources of temptation to sin for believers and thus must be rejected. Over against the Greco-Roman view that vices represent behavior that is ruinous to the achieving of virtue, Paul does not see avoiding these vices as representing spiritual achievement. Rather, avoiding them comes out of the inherent nature of one’s conversion faith commitment and thus set forth proper ‘trajectories’ for how to live that faith commitment in a way pleasing to God.

Thus understanding the nature of such vice lists, along with the ‘virtue’ lists, is essential to avoiding the pitfalls of morality that come out of genuine Christian faith. Much of Christian history is littered with unbiblical religious legalism largely due to failure to grasp the way the New Testament developed and used the vice / virtue lists of improper and proper actions and attitudes. It was this same kind of false legalism on the part of the false teachers in the Lycus Valley that Paul condemned; see 2:2-23 for details.

Literary Setting. As illustrated in the outline on the right, Col. 3:5-11 stands as the first set of admonitions coming off the foundational principle of behavior established in 3:1-4. When one ‘sets his mind on heavenly things’ (τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε), behavior and attitudes reflecting the worldly life of paganism no longer have a legitimate place in such living. Consequently, such things must be vigorously and decisively rejected. Failure to take such action will reflect a lack of genuine surrender of one’s life to Christ in the conversion moment.

Additionally, Col. 3:5-11 stand together with 3:12-17 as one of two sides of Christian moral responsibility. Verses 5-11 represent the ‘vice’ segment that is to be totally done away with. Verses 12-17 represent the positive traits that are to be brought into one’s life to replace the negative

Lasterkataloge, 81–83; cf. Kamlah, *Form*, 176, who claims they were multiform regarding both their content and form).

(b) However, it is going too far to say that the sins or virtues listed have little or nothing to do with the contexts in which they appear (cf. Lohse, 137, 138); the items specifically mentioned are often significant or exemplary (cf. Col 3:5, 8 and note below) and may change according to the situation (Schweizer, *Rechtfertigung*, 476). In most cases they are not full or exhaustive catalogs, a point that is made specifically at the conclusion of the list of vices in Galatians 5:19–21, “... envy, drunkenness, orgies, *and the like*” (καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις).

(c) Paul’s lists of vices are frequently set within the framework of God’s judgment and the final day: so evildoers, the unrighteous and those who practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God, according to 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, Galatians 5:21 and Ephesians 5:5; while Romans 1:29–31 indicates that those who commit these transgressions or encourage others to do the same deserve death. Following the list of pagan vices at Colossians 3:5 the apostle goes on to assert that on account of these things the wrath of God falls (v 6).

(d) These catalogs are not to be understood in a moralistic sense or as some kind of new law so that the avoidance of the sins or the exercise of the virtues listed would lead to the achievement of righteousness or the acquiring of merit. Rather, they describe the walk of the Christian (Rom 1:29–31 is a catalog of pagan vices). So the persons who clothe themselves with the graces of Christ, such as compassion, kindness, humility, and so on, are addressed as “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved” (Col 3:12). They have already been raised with Christ (3:1, 3), and have put on the new man (v 10). The graces produced in their lives are the fruit of God’s Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; cf. Eph 5:8–11; James 3:13–18, esp. v 18; Matt 7:16–20; Kamlah, *Form*, 182, claims that the influence of Ps 1:3 is discernible in these passages). Similarly, they are to reject pagan ways, such as fornication and idolatry, from their pre-Christian past (Col 3:5; cf. 1 Cor 6:9, 10; 1 Pet 4:3, “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” [NIV]) because they have already been united with Christ in his death (Col 2:11, 12, 20; 3:3). Getting rid of a repulsive collection of habits (as one might cast aside old clothes) such as anger, quick temper, malice together with slander and foul talk is to be effected because they have stripped off (ἀπεκδυσάμενοι) the “old man” that they once were, together with the practices he loved to indulge in (3:8, 9). Obedience to the apostolic injunctions to reject sin and be clothed with the graces of Christ is necessary for men and women who are in a new relationship with God through Christ and have become part of God’s new creation (Wibbing, *Lasterkataloge*, 123–27).

Outline of Colossians

Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2

Superscriptio: 1:1

Adscriptio: 1:2a

Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

Intercession: 1:9-12

Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20

Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul’s Ministry 1: 1:24-29

Paul’s Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15

Christian Living 2: 2:16-19

Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4

Christian Behavior: 3:5-11

Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1

Husband/Wife: 3:18-19

Father/Children: 3:20-21

Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9

Greetings: 4:10-17

Closing: 4:18

Letter Validation: 4:18a

Prayer Request: 4:18b

Benedictio: 4:19c

traits in vv. 5-11. Thus the two passages complement each other as expressions of the Heavenly focus principle in 3:1-4 (τὰ ἄνω). One must keep this clearly in view. Christianity is not a religion of “Thou shalt nots!” That is, it is not fundamentally life denying. Unquestionably, levels of morality are a clear teaching of Jesus and the apostles. But those demands contain positive expectations and not just negative prohibitions. Additionally, these expectations are not ‘tacked’ on to one’s faith commitment as a second level of requirement for salvation. To interpret them this way is to adopt the false view of Christianity advocated by the heretical teachers at Colossae that Paul condemns. They wanted a Christian legalism as their approach to religion; Paul would have nothing to do with such. He recognized out of his own spiritual journey the phoniness of such religion, as well as its lack of true spiritual strength and presence from God.

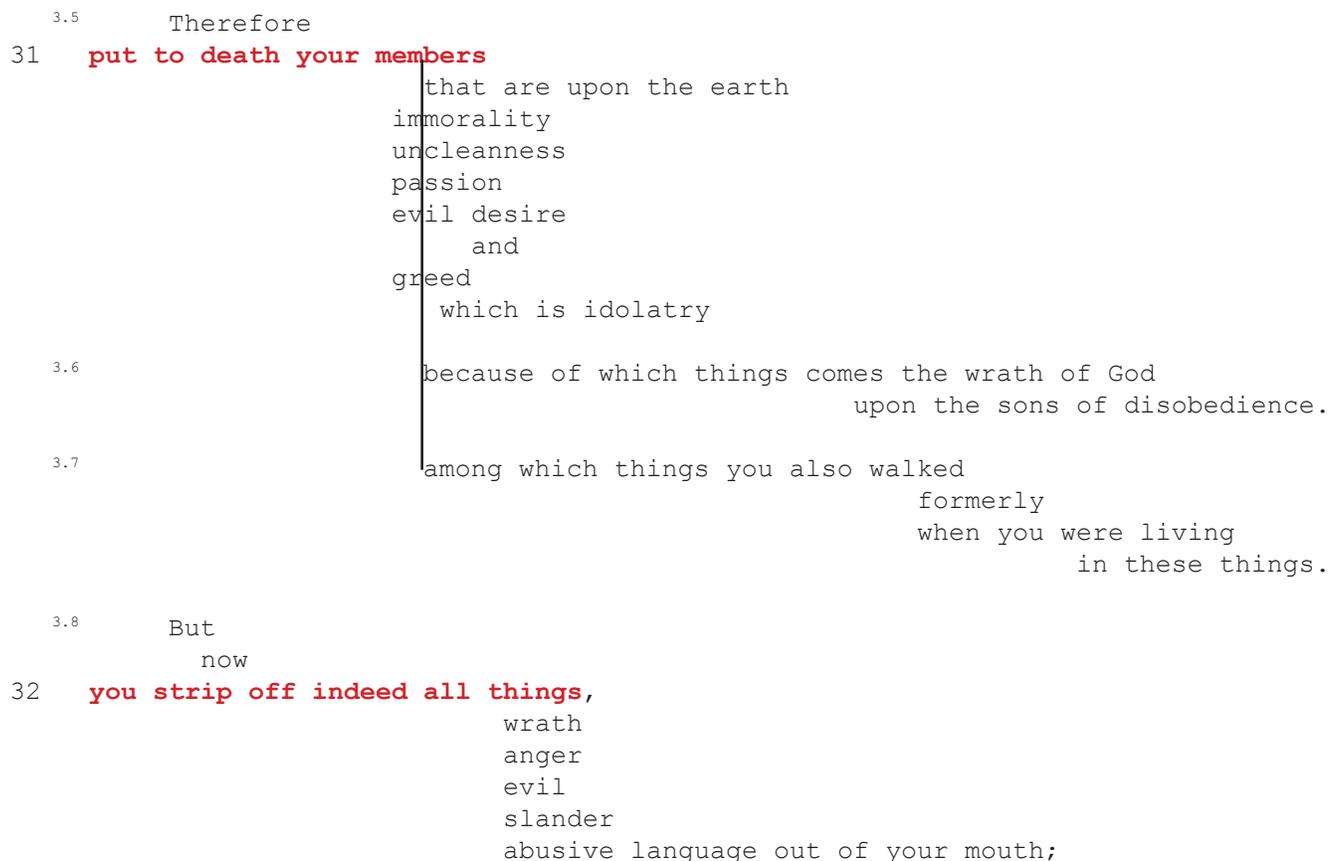
No matter how hard one tries, it is utterly impossible to ever live sufficiently righteous in order to gain God’s acceptance. This Paul declared to the Galatian believers in Gal. 3:10-11 (NRSV):

10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

10 Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν· γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά. 11 ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

The Christian life is a faith commitment journey from start to finish. The ‘life style’ that is to be lived grows out of this faith commitment and reflects love and gratitude to God for His salvation. Never are rules and regulations ever to tacked on as a second tier of commandments that must be obeyed either in order to complete the salvation experience, or else to hang on to one’s salvation. Either approach to Christian living represents a denial of the New Testament teaching of salvation, and shifts the dynamic for Christian living from devoted love for Christ to superficial adherence to externally imposed rules and regulations. Thus one becomes ‘dogmatized’ in the exact same way that he warned the Colossians against from the false teachers there (cf. 2:20-23). Spiritual disaster awaits those following such a path!

Literary Structure. The internal flow of thought can be represented visually by the block diagram of the original Greek text, and is reflected below in the literalistic English translation of the Greek.



33 ^{3.9} **Stop lying**

to one another,
having taken off the old nature
together with its practices
3.10 and
having put on the new (nature)
that is being renewed
in full knowledge
according to the image of its creator,
3.11 where there is not Greek and Jew
circumcised and uncircumcised,
barbarian, Scythian,
slave, freeman
but
(where) Christ is everything
and
(where) Christ is
in everything.

The text contains two sentences in the Greek text, # 31 and #s 32-33. The first command, #31 in vv. 5-7, mandates the 'execution' (Νεκρώσατε) of worldliness both in the life of the individual believer, and in the church. Aspects of worldliness are defined by the attached vice list containing five specific vices to be rejected. Two relative clauses in verses six and seven add the designations asserting that the wrath of God comes upon those practicing these things, and that this was the life style of the Colossians before coming to Christ.

The second sentence contains two more admonitions (#s 32-33) along similar lines as the first. The first of these two admonitions uses the imagery of taking off dirty clothes (ἀπόθεσθε) to demand a decisive action of ridding oneself of the vices listed in the second instance (v. 8). The third of the three admonitions demands that the Colossians stop lying to others (μὴ ψεύδεσθε). The means of achieving this is specified by the getting undressed / getting dressed imagery of two participle modifiers (ἀπεκδυσάμενοι / ἐνδυσάμενοι). They are to rid themselves of their old nature, and dress themselves in the new nature that God has provided in conversion. The means of this is the ongoing spiritual renewal that comes from God. The center point of this renewing is Christ. This overrides all social and ethnic barriers that divides and separates people (v. 11).

Exegesis of the Text:

The structure of the passage clearly revolves around the three admonitions that form the core of the text ideas. Each of these admonitions targets actions designed to shed the life style of paganism that the Colossians had come out of in their conversion to Christ. At the least, a large segment of the believing community there were not Jewish, and had grown up in the Gentile world of paganism. Paul here speaks in general terms of the pagan background of the Colossians. The breakdown of Jews and non-Jews in the Christian communities of the Lycus Valley is impossible to determine. But signals come from the letter strongly suggesting that both groups of people were represented in the churches.

Execute your members, vv. 5-7:

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life."

5 Νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, πορνείαν ἀκαθαρσίαν πάθος ἐπιθυμίαν κακὴν, καὶ τὴν πλεονεξίαν, ἣτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία, 6 δι' ἃ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ [ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας]. 7 ἐν οἷς καὶ ὑμεῖς περιεπατήσατέ ποτε, ὅτε ἐζῆτε ἐν τούτοις·

The connection of 3:5-11 to 3:1-4 is directly established by the connector "therefore" (οὖν). The inferential nature of the Greek conjunction means that the admonitions found in 3:5-11 are implicit in the concepts of 3:1-4, and now the writer is stating these implications directly. Other connecting signals are present as well,

such as the phrase τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, cf. v. 2 and v. 5.⁷ Thus a clear link to 3:1-4 is well established.

The core admonition is Νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. The verb is variously translated in modern English and German translations, but mostly as ‘put to death.’⁸ The believer has already ‘died with Christ’ (cf. 3:3, 2:20, 2:12), now the challenge is to functionally implement that spiritual death by rejecting worldliness. Rom. 6:11-15 amplifies Paul’s meaning clearly:

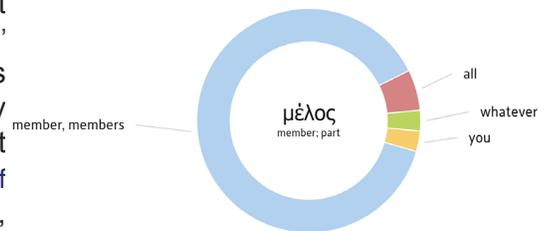
11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

11 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι] νεκροὺς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτία ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

12 Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ, 13 μὴδὲ παριστάνετε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὄπλα ἀδικίας τῇ ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ παραστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ὡσεὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ζῶντας καὶ τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὄπλα δικαιοσύνης τῷ θεῷ. 14 ἁμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν. 15 Τί οὖν; ἁμαρτήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμέν ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν; μὴ γένοιτο.

What is it that is to be put to death? The answer is τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, literally, “the members upon the earth.” And what are they? The following list of five vices is set in apposition to this phrase, thus providing definition of ‘members.’ Normally in the New Testament, the Greek word τὰ μέλη means body parts such as an arm or a hand. Many have been puzzled by this construction, but most likely Rom. 6:13a provides the correct insight: “No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness....” Our physical body is the opportunity for worldliness, and if we are not completely dedicated to Christ the ways of the world will gain entrance into our living through our physical being. By bringing our physical being under the control of Christ out of our conversion ‘death to self’ we then prevent entrance of the ways of the world into our life.



Here is a major point of difference between the ethics of apostolic Christianity and religious legalism, especially as being advocated by the false teachers at Colossae. In the gospel the presence of the Spirit of Christ is the key to blocking the efforts of ‘the flesh’ to influence and impact our life. Note Gal. 5:22-25:

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

22 Ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἀγάπη χαρὰ εἰρήνη, μακροθυμία χρηστότης ἀγαθωσύνη, πίστις 23 πραΰτης ἐγκράτεια· κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος. 24 οἱ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις. 25 εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματι, πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν.

Self-control (ἐγκράτεια) is one of the qualities produced in our lives by the Holy Spirit. And the leadership of the Holy Spirit is critical to overcoming the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16): “I tell you, ‘Be under the leadership of the Spirit and there is no way you will fall prey to the passions of the flesh’” (Λέγω δέ, πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε). The ability to reject the ways of the world comes not from within us, but

⁷“The wording of Paul’s first injunction in this paraenetic section is designed to recall what he has written previously in the earlier part of the letter: “therefore” (οὖν) harks back to the general context of chapters 2:20–3:4, in particular verses 3 and 4 where the theological basis is set forth (cf. Lohmeyer, 135; Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 63; W. Nauck, “Das οὖν-paräneticum,” *ZNW* 49 [1958] 134, 135), “put to death” (νεκρώσατε) recalls the union with Christ in his death (2:20; 3:3; cf. 2:11, 12), “the things on earth” (τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) picks up the language of verse 2, “[do not set your mind on] the things on earth,” while “members” (μέλη) is best understood against the background of “the body of sin” (τὸ σῶμα τῆς σαρκός, 2:11) which has been stripped off in the circumcision of Christ. Paul’s imperative is based upon the previous indicatives which spell out what God has done in his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 177]

⁸“Put to death”-- ASV, ESV, NT Rev. int., GNT, HCSB, ISV, HDNT, NET, NIV, NIrV; NKJV, NLT, NRSV, NT Rev. Int., RSV, TNIV, YLT; “mortify” -- AV 1873, KJV; “kill off” - Cotton Patch Version; “killing off” - Message; “consider as dead”-- NASB95; “put...out of your life”-- NCV; “by a once-for-all act, and at once, put to death”-- WuestNT;

“tötet“ -- LB 1912, EÜ2, ZB.

“Mortificate” -- VGCLem.

“

from the presence of God's Spirit in us. But we must choose to follow Him and draw upon His help in rebuffing the enticements of worldliness.

Vice List 1 (v. 5)	Vice List 2 (v. 8)	Virtue List (v. 12)
fornication	anger	compassion
impurity passion	wrath malice	kindness humility
evil desire	slander	meekness
greed (= idolatry)	abusive language (out of your mouth)	patience

The five fold list of vices -- fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)⁹ -- here has attracted considerable speculation. In the second list of vices in verse eight, exactly five more vices will be listed also. And then in v. 12, five virtues will be listed. Is Paul borrowing from other sources here?¹⁰ At first it may seem so, but one is on questionable grounds in making such a claim. Greek Stoicism, in contrast, taught four cardinal vices (folly, cowardice, intemperance, injustice) and four corresponding virtues (wisdom, manliness, self-control, righteousness). Comparison with various lists in the ancient world strongly suggests that Paul did not depend upon any of these lists for his understanding of improper and proper behavior. No consistency of items in the various lists in Paul's writings exists. The occasional nature of the letters in which these lists are found argues that individualized lists were compiled by Paul to meet the situation posed by each congregation that he was addressing in his letters. No standardized set or sets of lists were a part of early Christian instruction to new converts.

The five vices here in verse five, fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry), touch on both action and attitude.

Fornication (πορνείαν)¹¹ covers sexual sins of all kinds. This vice usually shows up at the top of most lists

⁹Note the three lists here in Colossian 3:

Vice List (1st; verse 5)	Vice List (2nd; verse 8)	Virtue List (Verse 12)
fornication (πορνείαν)	anger (ὀργήν)	compassion (σπλαγγνα οἰκτιρμοῦ)
impurity (ἀκαθαρσίαν)	wrath (θυμόν)	kindness (χρηστότητα)
passion (πάθος)	malice (κακίαν)	humility (ταπεινοφροσύνην)
evil desire (ἐπιθυμίαν κακήν)	slander (βλασφημίαν)	meekness (πραΰτητα)
greed (= idolatry) (τὴν πλεονεξίαν ἣτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία)	abusive language (αἰσχρολογία ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν)	patience (μακροθυμίαν,)

¹⁰“Lists of virtues and vices meet us in the NT, particularly in the writings of Paul (Rom 1:29–32; 1 Cor 5:9–11; 6:9, 10; Gal 5:19–23; Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 4:3, etc). They were a common form among pagan moralists and, at least as far as the vices were concerned, in the antipagan polemic of Jewish propagandists.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 178].

¹¹“πορνεία (‘prostitution,’ ‘unchastity,’ ‘fornication,’ of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse, BAG, 693) which is mentioned first in the list is always emphatically forbidden. Paul regularly brings to the attention of Gentile Christians the incompatibility of πορνεία and the kingdom of God. It is the first of the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19) from which believers are to abstain (1 Thess 4:3) or shun (1 Cor 6:18), since no ‘sexually immoral person’ (πόρνος) will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9; cf. 5:9–11; Eph 5:5). The term πορνεία carries several shades of meaning in the NT, ranging from extramarital sexual relationships (1 Thess 4:3) to marriages contracted with partners within illicit degrees of kinship (so probably Acts 15:20, though see M. Simon, “The Apostolic Decree and its Setting in the Ancient Church,” *BJRL* 52 [1969/70] 437–60, who understands the decree as a condensed code of levitical purity based mainly on Lev 16–18, but also as regards mixed marriages, on Exod 34:15–16; πορνεία should be understood as a general term including all sorts of sexual impurities). It denotes any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse (cf. BAG, 693; Hauck/Schulz, *TDNT* 6, 579–95; Reisser, *NIDNTT* 1, 497–501; this however has been questioned by B. Malina, “Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication?” *NovT* 14 [1972] 10–17; note, however, J. Jensen, “Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina.” *NovT* 20 [1978]: 161–84, who argues that the term and its cognates in the NT describe wanton sexual behavior including fornication) and the word-group was employed in the LXX (rendering the Hebrew *zānâh*) to denote unchastity, harlotry, prostitution and fornication (Gen 34:31, 38:15; Lev 19:29; Deut 22:21). In later rabbinic literature, זנות (= πορνεία) was understood as including not only prostitution and any kind of extramarital sexual intercourse (Abot 2:8) but also all marriages between relatives forbidden by rabbinic law (cf. *Str-B* 2, 729, 730). Incest (Test Rub 1:6; Test Jud 13:6; cf. Lev 18:6–18) and all kinds of unnatural sexual intercourse (e.g. Test Ben 9:1) were regarded as fornication (πορνεία). One who surrenders to it indicates ultimately that he has broken with God (Wisd 14:27, 28; cf. Reisser, *NIDNTT* 1, 499). In contrast to the loose living that prevailed in the Hellenistic world the NT, and in particular Pauline, teaching requires unconditional obedience to the prohibition against ‘fornication’ (cf. Vögtle, *Lasterkataloge*,

because of the very serious way it was viewed. **Impurity** (ἀκαθαρσίαν)¹² is closely connected to ‘fornication’ and serves to underscore the seriousness of sexual immorality. **Passion** (πάθος)¹³ underscores shameful desires, usually connected to illicit sexual behavior. **Evil desire** (ἐπιθυμίαν κακήν)¹⁴ connects back to ‘passion’ as a forbidden emotion or longing. Finally, **covetousness** (τὴν πλεονεξίαν)¹⁵ has the additional qualifier as

223–25, Hauck/Schulz, *TDNT* 6, 593, 594, and Lohse, 138).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 180-181].

¹²“ἀκαθαρσία (‘impurity,’ i.e. moral uncleanness, though on occasion it described ceremonial impurity: Matt 23:27; cf. Num 19:13) which occurs frequently with πορνεία (‘fornication’) and denotes immoral sexual conduct, underscores Paul’s injunction (according to Schweizer, 143 and *Rechtfertigung*, 475, the meaning of the first member, πορνεία, is developed through the following three). ‘Impurity’ like ‘fornication’ is a work of the flesh (Gal 5:19) and incompatible with life in the Spirit (1 Thess 4:7, 8, ‘For God did not call us to be impure [ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ] but to live a holy life ... he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit’; 2 Cor 12:21; Rom 1:24; Eph 5:3, 5; cf. Hauck, *TDNT* 3, 427–29). Like the other members of this list it points to the immoral state of the pre-Christian life, to the behavior of the man whose actions are determined by his commitment to his natural lusts; and yet it was all too easy for Gentile converts to slip back into pre-conversion ways—hence the admonition.” [[Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 181]

¹³“πάθος (‘passion’) was used by the Stoics to describe the person who allowed himself to be dominated by his emotions, and therefore could not attain ‘tranquility’ (ἀπάθεια; cf. Vögtle, *Lasterkataloge*, 208–210). In the NT references, all of which occur in Paul (Rom 1:26; Col 3:5 and 1 Thess 4:5), it does not turn up in this Stoic sense; rather it denotes shameful passion which leads to sexual excesses (1 Thess 4:5; the vices of homosexuality at Rom 1:26; note Michaelis, *TDNT* 5, 928).” [[Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 182]

¹⁴“ἐπιθυμία (‘desire,’ ‘longing’) was employed in a positive fashion to describe a variety of aims including the longing to see a Christian congregation (1 Thess 2:17) or the desire to depart and be with Christ (Phil 1:23; cf. Luke 22:15; the verb ‘desire,’ ἐπιθυμέω, can also be used in a good sense: Matt 13:17; Luke 17:22; 1 Tim 3:1; Heb 6:11; 1 Pet 1:12; cf. Büchsel, *TDNT* 3, 168–71). Here the desire is characterized negatively with the addition of the adjective ‘evil’ (κακήν) so that it describes wicked concupiscence (Büchsel, *TDNT* 3, 170, 171, points out that the noun and the verb usually indicate evil desires which may then be expanded with reference to the object of the longing: Matt 5:28, a woman; Mark 4:19, other things; 1 Cor 10:6, evil things; or the direction: Gal 5:17, against the Spirit; or the vehicle or origin: Rom 1:24, the heart; Rom 6:12, the body; Gal 5:16; Eph 2:3; 1 John 2:16; 2 Pet 2:18, the flesh, and so on). Evil desire is a manifestation of the sin which dwells in the natural man and which controls him. It reveals his carnality (Gal 5:16, 24), his separation from God and his subjection to divine wrath (Rom 1:18–24).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 182]

¹⁵“The final member of the list ‘covetousness’ (πλεονεξία, *lit.* ‘a desire to have more,’ so meaning ‘greediness,’ ‘insatiableness,’ ‘avarice,’ BAG, 667; see Delling, *TDNT* 6, 266–74, and Selzer, *NIDNTT* 1, 137, 138) is especially accented as a gross sin: ‘and that chief vice, covetousness which is idolatry’ (so BDF para. 258[1], who note, ‘the addition of the relative clause ἥτις etc occasions the use of the article by making the preceding noun definite’; cf. Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 64; Schweizer, 143, 144). It breaks the sequence by turning attention from sexual vices to the more general sin of greed (Martin, NCB, 103). In some contexts, of course, covetousness can have sexual overtones (cf. the cognate πλεονεκτέω at 1 Thess 4:6; the noun was used by Plato and Aristotle to include sexual desire), but normally it refers to the sin of acquisitiveness, the insatiable desire to lay hands on material things. The word group appears only occasionally in the LXX, occurring chiefly in the denunciations and warnings of the prophets about dishonest gain and the enrichment of the politically powerful by means of violence (Jer 22:17; Ezek 22:27; Hab 2:9). The ungodly and thoroughly bad character of covetousness comes out in the LXX references (cf. 2 Macc 4:50). Accordingly, the psalmist prays that he may be preserved from it (Ps 119:36 [LXX 118:36]). Even in the Greco-Roman world covetousness was repudiated; there was no place for it in a just and equitable society.

“The NT warns again and again about the sin of covetousness, particularly as a means of security (Luke 12:15, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed [ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας]). In the catalogs of vices covetousness is the mark of a life which lacks the knowledge of God (Rom 1:29; cf. 1 Cor 5:10, 11; 6:10, 11; Eph 5:3). Its presence along with other kinds of wickedness is evidence, according to Paul, of the power of sin in the ravaging of human relationships (Delling, *TDNT* 6, 272) and a sign that God has given men and women over to a depraved mind (Rom 1:28). For Christians involved in the ministry of God’s Word there is a particular danger of covetousness. The temptation to abuse one’s position and to exploit the preaching of God’s Word for personal gain was a danger from which the early church did not escape. Paul refutes the suggestion that he and his co-workers had exploited anyone at Corinth, desiring to enrich themselves by their ministry (cf. the cognate πλεονεκτέω, ‘cheat,’ ‘defraud,’ used at 2 Cor 7:2 and 12:17). In his missionary work at Thessalonica, as elsewhere, he was free not only from self-seeking motives (1 Thess 2:4, 5) which might have been hidden behind an unselfish activity (v 3) but also from covetousness; when he preached he had no ulterior purpose of enriching himself (‘nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed [οὔτε ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας];’ v 5; cf. Delling, *TDNT* 6, 273). Although the charge could not stick in the case of Paul, for it was wholly unfounded, there were others who abused their position to satisfy their greed: Paul’s opponents at Corinth are described as ‘peddlers of God’s word’ (καπηλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, 2 Cor 2:17), while according to 2 Peter 2:3, 14 the false teachers exploited the congregation, being motivated

being idolatry (ἥτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία). Its particular danger is that it marks one as lacking knowledge of God, and having opted to worship substitute deities.

The list of five vices is followed by two Greek relative clauses defining some general traits of such vices.

First, these vices become the basis of the imposition of God's wrath: "On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient" (δι' ἃ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργή τοῦ θεοῦ [ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας]¹⁶). Frequently in the vice lists, reference will be made to God's judgment¹⁷ being imposed upon those practicing the specified vices.¹⁸ Such behavior is so contrary to the expectation of righteousness from believers that to live like this and claim to be a Christian is utterly impossible. The designation of the objects of God's wrath follows a Hebrew oriented expression: ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας.¹⁹ Although in the context mainly Gentiles by their greed for material gain — in fact, they are said to be experts in greed! But it was not only those involved in the ministry of God's Word who were open to the temptation of covetousness. Paul's exhortation here in verse 5 is addressed to *all* the readers. Like immorality and impurity, covetousness is to be put to death by *all* who died and rose with Christ.

"The danger of covetousness is stressed emphatically because it is so closely related to idolatry: rather surprisingly the former is equated with the latter (τὴν πλεονεξίαν ἥτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία). The two sins stood together in Jewish exhortations and were condemned as part of the horrors of paganism. According to the Testament of Judah (19:1) greed seized control of a man, led him away from God and held him captive in idolatry: 'The love of money leads to idolatry; because, when led astray through money, men name as gods those who are not gods.' Elsewhere in Jewish thought greed was soundly condemned (by Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1:23–27; cf. Dellling, *TDNT* 6, 270; for rabbinic examples see Str-B 3, 606, 607; and note the negative judgment on possessions in the writings of the Qumran community: 1QpHab 6:1; 8:11, 12; 1QS 10:19, 11:2, etc). Since a man can serve only one master, God or mammon, but not both (Matt 6:24), then if he sets his heart on wealth, he adores false gods and abandons the one true God (Lohse, 139; Schweizer, *Text*, 200, aptly remarks: 'When man has lost God, he is at the mercy of all things, because his own covetousness takes the place of God'). Instead of setting his aims and whole orientation on the things above, at the center of which is the exalted Christ, he is seeking the things below. He worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). The apostle's words in Romans 7:7, 8 indicate how the commandment revealed to him the special deadliness of this subtle sin. Perhaps it is the more dangerous because it may assume so many respectable forms." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 183–184]

¹⁶The significance of the [] around ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας signals that some ancient copies of this text only read "because of these things the wrath of God comes." But the weight of manuscript evidence favors 'upon the sons of disobedience' as being a part of the original writing of the text.

¹⁷Typically Jewish also is the belief that such behavior (idolatry and sexual immorality) is the subject of God's judgment (cf. Rom. 1:32; 1 Cor. 5:9–13; 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Thes. 4:3–6). The ὀργή τοῦ θεοῦ (divine 'retribution' in REB, NJB) itself was not peculiar to Jewish theology. On the contrary, it was a familiar concept in the ancient world: divine indignation as heaven's response to human impiety or transgression of divinely approved laws, or as a way of explaining communal catastrophes or unexpected sickness or death (H. Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 5.383–92). Also common to all strands of religion in the ancient world was an awareness of the seeming irrationality and incalculability of this wrath. But in Israel's religion the fundamental premise of election by the one God provided the key means to resolve the problem of theodicy. God's wrath was directed against Israel itself for its failure to live in accordance with its covenant obligations, not least its lapses into idolatry and immorality (e.g., Exod. 32:10–12; Num. 25:1–4; Deut. 29:16–28; 2 Chron. 24:18; Jer. 7:16–20; 25:6; Ezekiel 22; Mic. 5:10–15; 1QS 2:15; 5:12; Matt. 3:7), but also against the other nations for failure to recognize Israel as Yahweh's people (e.g., Isa. 34:2; Jer. 10:25; 50:13; Zech. 1:15; see particularly J. Fichtner, *TDNT* 5.395–409). [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 216.]

¹⁸Cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10 (NRSV): "9 **Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived!** Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—**none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.** 11 And this is what some of you used to be..."

9 ἢ οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; μὴ πλανᾶσθε· οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλολάτραι οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενοκοῖται 10 οὔτε κλέπται οὔτε πλεονέκται, οὐ μέθυστοι, οὐ λοιδοροὶ, οὐχ ἄρπαγες **βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσουσιν.** 11 καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε...

1 Cor. 5:13 (NRSV): "God will judge those outside. 'Drive out the wicked person from among you.'"

τοὺς δὲ ἔξω ὁ θεὸς κρινεῖ. ἐξάρατε τὸν πονηρὸν ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν.

Gal. 5:21 (NRSV): "19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. **I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**"

19 φανερά δὲ ἐστὶν τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, ἅτινά ἐστιν πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσελγεία, 20 εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία, ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζῆλος, θυμοί, ἐριθείαι, διχοστασίαι, αἰρέσεις, 21 φθόνος, μέθαι, κῶμοι καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις, **ἃ προλέγω ὑμῖν, καθὼς προεῖπον ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες βασιλείαν θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν.**

¹⁹ἀπειθεία, ας, ἢ (s. ἀπειθής; X., Mem. 3, 5, 5 et al.; ins; pap; 4 Macc 8:9, 18: 12:4; PsSol 17:20) disobedience, in our lit. al-ways of disob. toward God (cp. Jos., Ant. 3, 316); somet. w. the connotation of disbelief in the Christian gospel (see ἀπειθέω). Those who oppose God are called υἱοὶ τῆς ἀ. Eph 2:2; 5:6; Col 3:6 (some mss. om.; s. KKuhn, NTS 7, '61, 339 for Qumran parallels).

are in mind, this way of defining those experiencing God's wrath²⁰ added more intensity to the warning.

Second, these vices typified the pre-Christian life style of the Colossians: "These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life" (έν οἷς καὶ ὑμεῖς περιεπατήσατέ ποτε ὅτε ἐζήτε έν τοῦτοις). These vices do not single out a pagan life style over against a non-religious Jewish life style. Although typical of a non-Jewish way of living, Jewish individuals with little serious religious concern for obeying the Torah could have easily become guilty of living the same way.

Helpful to note is the 'once-now' contrast (ποτε / νυνὶ δὲ; vv. 7-8) that shows up also in 1:21-22 (once estranged [ποτε] / now reconciled [νυνὶ δὲ]) and 2:13 (were dead [νεκροὺς ὄντας] / now made alive [συνεζωποίησεν]). Each highlights the dramatic difference that Christ has made in conversion.

Strip off everything, v. 8:

8 But now you must get rid of all such things — anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

8 νυνὶ δὲ ἀπόθεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς τὰ πάντα, ὀργήν, θυμόν, κακίαν, βλασφημίαν, αἰσχρολογίαν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν

The second admonition continues the theme of the first, just with different terms. The image expressed by the verb shifts to clothing with the idea of getting undressed. Worldliness is pictured as dirty ragged clothes that need to be thrown away. They can't be washed and cleaned up; they're too worthless for that. Rather, they need to be discarded. Continued wearing of them jeopardizes one's health. The Aorist imperative Greek verb here, ἀπόθεσθε, parallels the one in the first admonition. Both call for decisive action to rid oneself of all vestiges of worldliness. Additionally the use of καὶ in the ascensive function, 'indeed,' increases the urgency of the verb action. The direct stating of the verb subject, ὑμεῖς, with the imperative verb adds further urgency as well.

What must be shed off is "all such things" (τὰ πάντα), which is then defined by a vice list containing five items.²¹ The list names "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth" (ὀργήν, θυμόν, κακίαν, βλασφημίαν, αἰσχρολογίαν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν) as expressions of worldliness. As the above table comparing these two lists illustrates, no coordination of sequence or of items is reflected in the naming of individual items. These were selected because in Paul's understanding of the situation at Colossae they were most relevant to the needs of the people there. The first three, "anger, wrath, malice," deal with attitude and the last two, "slander, and abusive language from your mouth" with verbal expression. **Anger** and **wrath** (ὀργήν, θυμόν) are closely connected with each other with the first being the more settled attitude and the second **being the more explosive attitude**.²² The third vice, **κακίαν**, transitions from attitude to action as "the attitude of disob. of Israelites **Ro 11:30**; **Hb 4:6, 11**; of all humanity **Ro 11:32**. Personified Hs 9, 15, 3.—DELG s.v. πείθομαι. M-M. TW." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 99.]

²⁰"The verb (ἔρχεται) could denote a wrath already in operation — that is, presumably, as in Rom. 1:18–32, in the consequences which follow from failure to acknowledge and worship God as God (Caird 205). In that case the wrath takes the form of God giving or allowing his human creatures what they want, leaving them to their own devices — the continuing avarice and abuse of sexual relations being its own reward. But the concept as taken over by the first Christians is more typically future oriented; so predominantly in Paul (Rom. 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; 1 Thes. 5:9). And the closest parallel (1 Thes. 1:10: τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης; cf. Matt. 3:7/Luke 3:7: 'the coming wrath') suggests that this is what is in view here — 'is going to come, is about to come' — a further indication that expectation of an imminent end may well have been still lively at this time (see also 1:24 and 3:4). The thought of final judgment was also familiar in Greek thought (F. Büchsel, TDNT 3.934), but again it is particularly prominent in Jewish tradition (e.g., Isa. 34:8; Dan. 7:9–11; Joel 2:1–2; Mal. 4:1; Jubilees 5:10–16; 1 Enoch 90:20–27), not least as a day of 'wrath' (Isa. 13:6–16; Zeph. 1:15, 18; 2:2–3; 3:8; for a full treatment of ὀργή θεοῦ in the New Testament see particularly G. Stählin, TDNT 5.422–47; briefly O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon 184–85)." [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 216-17.]

²¹For the comparative listing see the above table.

²²"Gk. ὀργή, θυμός. The two terms overlap in meaning, and both can be used in a nobler and a less noble sense. For ὀργή in the sense of divine retribution see v. 6 above, but human beings are urged to be "slow to anger, because human anger does not produce divine righteousness" (Jas. 1:19–20). In Rom. 2:8 θυμός is used along with ὀργή of divine retribution against those who "obey wickedness"; but elsewhere Paul mentions it as something which Christians should avoid. For Plato θυμός is the "spirited" element in the human soul, which needs to be controlled by the rational element, much as a sheepdog needs to be controlled by the shepherd (*Republic* 4.440D). Aristotle says that uncontrolled θυμός "does indeed seem to hear the voice of reason, but to hear it wrongly, like impetuous servants who rush off before hearing all that is said, or like dogs which start barking before waiting to see if one is a friend or not" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 7.6.1.1149a3). To θυμός as to ὀργή the injunction of Eph. 4:26 applies: "Be angry

that wishes or does harm to another” (Bruce, *NICNT*, 143).²³ The last two vices have to do with speech. **Slander**, βλασφημίαν, defines intentional misrepresentation of the character of another by stating lies about them to other people. The final vice, **abusive language from your mouth**, (αἰσχρολογία ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν) can mean obscene language but here moves toward abusive speech directed against another person.²⁴

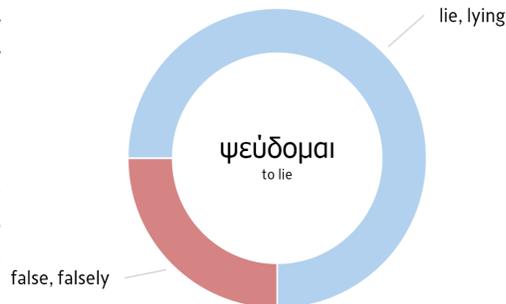
Both vice lists define together a pagan life style that has no legitimacy in the life of a believer. Thus the apostle calls upon the Colossians to take decisive action in clearing out any and all of these vices that they have continued to practice after coming to Christ.

Stop lying, vv. 9-11:

9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

9 μὴ ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ 10 καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν, 11 ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι Ἕλληνας καὶ Ἰουδαίους, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

The third admonition, “**Stop lying**” (μὴ ψεύδεσθε), clearly demands cessation of something assumed to already be taking place.²⁵ This admonition is linked to the fourth and fifth vices in the preceding list as a speech action.²⁶ The highlighting of it in the grammatical structure



(ὀργίζεσθε) without sinning” (see p. 361 below). On the Stoic definition of ὀργή see H. Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 5, p. 384, n. 6 (s.v. ὀργή).” [F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 143]

²³“Along with these, ‘malice’ (κακία) is to be removed since it is an evil force that destroys fellowship. The term is a general one (cf. BAG, 397, Grundmann, *TDNT* 3, 482–84) ranging from ‘trouble’ (with no moral implications, Matt 6:34), to a definitely culpable attitude of ‘wickedness.’ It might denote a single iniquity such as the grasping desire of Simon Magus (Acts 8:22) or be used more generally for the evil men do to one another. Martin includes it as one of the sins of speech (NCB, 104, 105; he claims that at 1 Cor 5:8; 14:20; Rom 1:29 and Eph 4:31 it depicts the havoc to human society wrought by evil-speaking), though it is possible to regard it here as ‘malice,’ that is, the deliberate intention to harm which is subsequently expressed in evil speech such as ‘slander’ and ‘abusive language.’” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 185]

²⁴“The last of the five vices, αἰσχρολογία (‘foul talk’) like its counterpart in the previous list (‘covetousness,’ v 5), is especially emphasized this time by the additional words ‘out of your mouth’ (cf. Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 44; some commentators take the phrase as applying to both ‘slander’ and ‘foul talk,’ so for example Abbott, 283; others, as we have noted above, link the phrase with the verb ‘put off’). αἰσχρολογία occurs only here in the NT but outside the Bible covers the ideas of obscene speech or abusive language (Lightfoot, 212, who supposes that the two notions of ‘filthiness’ and ‘evil-speaking’ are included here; cf. BAG, 25). Such language ought to be stopped before it comes out of their mouths.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 185]

²⁵The present prohibitive imperative verb demanded that an action be stopped, while the Aorist prohibitive subjunctive verb demanded that the action not take place at all.

²⁶“**ψεύδομαι** in our lit. only mid. (Hom.+); fut. ψεύσομαι; 1 aor. ἐψεύσαμην; pf. 2 sg. ἔψευσαι (Sus 55 LXX; Sus 59 Theod.). Pass.: aor. inf. ψευσθῆναι (Mel., P. 26, 183), ptc. ψευσθεῖς (Just., D. 134, 3); pf. ptc. ἐψευσμένος (Tat. 16, 1).

1. to tell a falsehood, lie abs. (X., Mem. 2, 6, 36; Aristot., EN 2, 7, 4, 7 et al.; Pr 14:5; TestAbr B 13 p. 118, 3 [Stone p. 84]; TestJos 13:9; ApcSed 7:8; Philo, Leg. All. 3, 124; Just., D. 117, 4; Tat. 32, 1) Mt 5:11; **Hb 6:18** (θεός is subj. acc.); **1J 1:6**; **Rv 3:9**; 1 Cl 27:2abc (Artem. 2, 69 p. 161, 15 ἀλλότριον θεῶν τὸ ψεύδεσθαι); Hm 3:2. As a formula of affirmation οὐ ψεύδομαι (Jos., Vi. 296; cp. Plut., Mor. 1059a) **Ro 9:1**; **2 Cor 11:31**; **Gal 1:20**; **1 Ti 2:7**. εἰς τινα tell lies against someone, i.e. to that person’s detriment (Sus 55 LXX) **Col 3:9**. κατὰ τινος against someth. κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας against the truth **Js 3:14** (cp. Bel 11 Theod.). The pers. who is harmed by the lie can be added in the dat. (Ps 17:45; 88:36; Josh 24:27; Jer 5:12; JosAs 24:6) οὐκ ἀνθρώποις ἀλλὰ τῷ θεῷ **Ac 5:4**. πάντα in every particular **14:19** v.l. (Tat. 22, 2). τὶ in any point Papias (2:15).

2. to attempt to deceive by lying, tell lies to, impose upon τινὰ someone (Eur., X. et al.; Plut., Alcib. 206 [26, 8], Marcell. 314 [27, 7]; Jos., Ant. 3, 273; 13, 25; PSI 232, 10) **Ac 5:3** (Appian, Liby. 27 §113 τίς σε δαίμων ἐβλαψε ... ψεύσασθαι θεοὺς οὓς ὤμοσας;=‘what evil spirit beguiled you ... to lie to the gods by whom you swore?’; Tat. 19, 3 ἐαυτῶν); 1 Cl 15:4 (Ps 77:36, but w. αὐτῶ).—DELG. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1096-97.]

may suggest that it posed an especially wide spread problem at Colossae. The phrase “to one another” (εἰς ἀλλήλους) stresses the practice of lying within the Christian community, and not just to the outside world. One should note that lying from the biblical perspective is not defined as inconsistent statements with the facts. Instead, lying is defined as stating something contradictory to God’s character and divinely stated truths. The example of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 illustrates this, especially verse four. Truthfulness and integrity of speech loom as very important issues in the Christian life.²⁷ Failure at this point inside the believing community leads to disaster and chaos. And the same is true for society in general. Loss of respect for and trust of other people produces a dysfunctional society.

The basis for stopping the habit of lying is set forth by two inner connected participles built around the clothing metaphor (getting undressed, and, getting dressed; ἀπεκδυσάμενοι and ἐνδυσάμενοι).²⁸ The Aorist participles clearly signal this as a past event, that points to their conversion.²⁹ When they came to Christ initially they got ‘undressed.’ And at the same time they ‘put on’ new clothes.

What clothes do they take off, and then what do they put on instead? **The old garments** are described as “the old self with its practices” (τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ). In conversion the old self died. Consequently the living practices of the old life have no basis or reason to continue.³⁰ **The new garments** that replaced them are “with the new self” (τὸν νέον). A new nature was created by God in conversion through having “been raised with Christ” (cf. 3:1). Thus the old self, τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον, is replaced by the new self, τὸν νέον. This inner self is closely identified with outward actions: τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ, and τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν. The inner existence prior to Christ has become corrupted and must be replaced. But only God can replace it with a new inner

²⁷“Only here and in Eph. 4:25 within the Paulines is such a concern voiced, though Paul on several occasions vouched formally for his own honesty: ‘I am not lying’ (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; also 1 Tim. 2:7). But the concern was certainly present in other churches (Acts 5:3–4; Jas. 3:14; 1 John 1:6; Didache 3:5; Hermas Mandates 3.2). The antisocial effects of lying were common ground in Jewish and Greek ethics (see H. Conzelmann, TDNT 9.594–600).” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 219-20.]

²⁸“The image of putting off and putting on a garment was widespread in the ancient world and was used in the mystery religions in order to interpret the action of initiation. The account, e.g., that Apuleius gives in the *Metamorphoses* of Isis’ rites describes how the initiate was clothed in twelve robes during the initiation ceremony and received a garment adorned with images of animals.⁵³ The putting on of the garment consecrated him, i.e. he was filled with the powers of the cosmos and experienced within himself a physical-substantial transformation by which he received a share of the divine power of life.⁵⁴ Gnostic texts understand the image of putting on or receiving the garment as expressing that the redemption had come true, a redemption which is accomplished while man is taken up into the divine world and suffused with its light and power.⁵⁵ When Paul employs the image of putting off and putting on, he describes neither an ontological transformation of man nor the release of a divine kernel so as to allow it to develop fully and to let man possess salvation. Rather, the image illustrates the change of rule that has taken place in baptism. The baptized have been transferred into the domain of Christ’s rule and are called to conduct their lives in obedience. Therefore, they need words of exhortatory encouragement and of comforting support on their way. Consequently, to the statement ‘for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ’ (ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε Gal 3:27) the admonition must be added: ‘but put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ (ἀλλὰ ἐνδύσασθε τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν Rom 13:14*). This admonition demands of the Christian that he actualize what has already happened, that he accept what God has done for him, and that, in obedience, he enter into the new life given him in baptism.⁵⁶

“What must be put aside is the old man, who — and here the image almost breaks down — not only adheres to man like a garment, but who is man himself. He must hand himself over to death because ‘our old self has been crucified’ (ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη Rom 6:6).⁵⁷ Since he has already died, he must now be laid to rest⁵⁸ ‘with his practices’⁵⁹ (σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ), with his manner of conduct and action (cf. Rom 8:13) as it had been described in the catalog of vices.” [Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon a Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon.*, Translation of *Die Briefe an Die Kolosser Und an Philemon.*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 141.]

²⁹Some commentators seek to translate these participles as imperatives, following the pattern of a similar expression in Eph. 4:22-24 (NRSV): “22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” But this understanding is highly questionable and unnecessary.

³⁰“The essence of it is that the Christian has had a radical, life-changing experience in which he has put off the old self with its practices (i.e., habits or characteristic actions) and has put on the new self. The metaphor again is one of clothing. The ‘old self’ (i.e., the old, unregenerate self; RSV, ‘old nature’) is like a dirty, worn-out garment that is stripped from the body and thrown away.” [Curtis Vaughan, “Colossians” In , in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians Through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 215.]

existence. This new nature reflects God's nature (εἰκόνα) as our Heavenly Father.

Several aspects of this new self are defined by Paul. **First**, it is “being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν). A continual process of spiritual renewal was launched in conversion.³¹ The spiritual renewal focuses on growing understanding of Christ and of spiritual reality: εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν.³² And this knowledge is defined by “the image of its creator” (κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν). That is, the renewing process is designed to make the believer increasingly like Christ.³³

Second, this renewing process takes place where “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all” (ὅπου οὐκ ἔστι Ἕλλην καὶ Ἰουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν

³¹Cf. **2 Cor. 4:16** (NRSV): “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, *our inner nature is being renewed day by day.*”

Διὸ οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ’ *ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται* ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα.

2 Cor. 3:18 (NRSV): “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, *are being transformed into the same image* from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”

ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένω προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι *τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα* ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.

³²The objective of this renewing process is ‘for knowledge’ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν. The use of ἐπίγνωσις underscores understanding derived out of conscious relationship with Christ, who is the essence of the new garment that was ‘put on’ in conversion. The contours of that knowledge are shaped by God as Creator, and center in the character of Christ being reproduced in our life.

³³“Here the ‘new man,’ like its opposite ‘the old man,’ has a twofold significance—singular and corporate. On the one hand, it has an individual reference, designating the new nature which the Colossians had put on and which was continually being renewed (the present participle ἀνακαινούμενον indicates an ongoing process; cf. Rom 12:2) in accordance with the Creator’s image. The point about the renewal of the new man is to be compared with what Paul says about the ‘inner man’ (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος) of 2 Corinthians 4:16 which is also being renewed from day to day (ἀνακαινοῦνται). According to Ephesians 3:16, through a similar process the addressees are strengthened with power by God’s Spirit ‘for the inner man’ (εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον; cf. Rom 7:22). On the other hand, the expression, ‘the new man,’ has a corporate reference designating the new humanity in Christ. Just as the ‘old man’ is what they once were ‘in Adam,’ the embodiment of unregenerate humanity, so the ‘new man’ is what they now are ‘in Christ,’ the embodiment of the new humanity. Verse 11 with its statements about the abolition of racial, religious, cultural and social barriers underscores this corporate aspect (cf. Schnackenburg, *Schriften*, 392–411; and for forceful statements in favor of this corporate emphasis see Robinson, *Body*, 58–67, and Tannehill, *Dying*, 25). The renewal refers not simply to an individual change of character but also to a corporate recreation of humanity in the Creator’s image. Christ is the “new man” whom the Colossians have put on. He is the second Adam, the head of a new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

“τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν. Grammatically it seems best to regard the prepositional phrase κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν (‘after the image of its Creator’) as modifying τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον (‘which is being renewed’; cf. Larsson, *Christus*, 198; this is preferable to its being attached to ἐπίγνωσιν, ‘knowledge’: for a discussion of this and other alternatives see Jervell, *Imago*, 248, 249, and Merk, *Handeln*, 205). Accordingly, the image of the Creator serves as the model or archetype for the renewal of the new man—a renewal that has in view the readers’ progressive increase in true knowledge (Eph 4:24 speaks of the creation of the new man but not, as does Col 3:10, of its constant renewal).

“κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν. ‘After the image of its Creator.’ Even though this phrase is not an explicit Scripture citation one cannot miss the allusion to Genesis 1:27, where the first Adam is said to have been created by God ‘in his own image’ (κατ’ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ). However, the first Adam is now regarded as the ‘old man’ that has been discarded so that the believer may put on the new man. Although Chrysostom and some modern writers regarded the words τοῦ κτίσαντος as designating Christ as the Creator it is, in fact, a description of God (cf. Eph 4:24 where it is stated that the new man is created κατὰ φεόν, lit. ‘according to God,’ or as the *RSV* puts it ‘after the likeness of God’; in the Pauline material as well as in the rest of the NT God is the subject of κτίζω, ‘create’: Rom 1:25; Eph 3:9; cf. 1 Cor 11:9; Eph 2:10; 4:24; 1 Tim 4:3; Matt 19:4; Mark 13:19; 1 Pet 4:19; Rev 4:11; 10:6; while in Col 1:16, as we have already shown, God is the logical subject of the passive verb ‘created,’ ἐκτίσθη and ἔκτισται; cf. Moule, 120, Jervell, *Imago*, 249, 250, G. Dellling, “Partizipiale Gottesprädikationen in den Briefen des Neuen Testaments,” *ST* 17 [1963] 25, Merk, *Handeln*, 207, Lohse, 143, and Martin, NCB, 107). However, to say that the new man is being renewed “according to the image of God,” in the light of the hymnic paragraph where Christ is praised as the εἰκὼν (“image”) of God (1:15; see 42–44) and Paul’s Christological teaching elsewhere (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 4:4; and Phil 2:6) means that God’s recreation of man ‘is in the pattern of Christ, who is God’s Likeness absolutely’ (Moule, 120). This is not at variance with the apostle’s statements elsewhere which speak of the Christian’s transformation into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21), for while the former makes it clear that the redeemed become the ‘new man’ or καινὴ κτίσις (‘new creation’) to whom the image of Gods—which Adam lost—has been restored, the latter denotes that this restoration of the divine image is nothing other than their transformation into the image of Christ (Kim, *Paul’s Gospel*, 406, cf. 295, 296). The expression ‘him that created him’ (αὐτόν refers to the ‘new man’) does not imply that Christ personally is a created being even though he is the new man whom believers have put on: ‘the new man who is created is the new personality that each believer becomes when he is reborn as a member of the new creation whose source of life is Christ’ (Bruce, 273; cf. Larsson, *Christus*, 209).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 188]

Χριστός). This new humanity emerging out of the spiritual creation of God moves beyond human distinctions and boundaries of social organization. The relative adverb ὅπου, ‘where,’ locates this emerging new humanity in the renewing process taking place both in the individual and in the corporate community of believers.

Racially based prejudices, such as those of the Jews (Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised),³⁴ or those of the Greeks (Greek...barbarian, Scythian)³⁵ have no validity in this new humanity. Social status distinctions between slave and non-slave are no longer valid.³⁶ The radicalism of Christianity in both ancient and modern society is clear in declarations like this.³⁷ Through Christ, God has set about to build a brand new humanity in which biases and social status differences are abolished.³⁸ But such a humanity becomes possible

³⁴“Ἕλληνας καὶ Ἰουδαίους περιτομῆ καὶ ἀκροβυστία. Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised. Greeks and Jews are mentioned first in the series to describe the whole of humanity (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24; 10:32; 12:13; Gal 3:28; Greeks are mentioned as the outstanding representatives of the Gentiles; on the Jew in Paul see Gutbrod, *TDNT* 3, 380–82, and on Greek Windisch, *TDNT* 2, 512–16). Normally the Jews appear first as an expression of their privileged place in salvation history. Here the order is reversed, probably because the majority of the readers were Gentile Christians (cf. 1:21, 22; 2:13). In Christ the old distinction between Jew and Gentile was abolished, a remarkable achievement of the gospel. So circumcision (Meyer, *TDNT* 6, 82, 83; Hahn, *NIDNTT* 1, 307–12) and uncircumcision (Schmidt, *TDNT* 1, 225, 226) have lost their meaning; it is the new creation (καὶνὴ κτίσις, Gal 6:15) that really counts (in both Galatians and Colossians it was necessary for Paul to underscore the abolition of the distinction between Jew and Gentile in the light of the Jewish stamp of the teaching he was countering, so Bruce, 275).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 188]

³⁵βάρβαρος, Σκύθης. “Barbarian, Scythian.” The list of terms overlaps somewhat. “Barbarian” (Windisch, *TDNT* 1, 546–53) and “Scythian” (Michel, *TDNT* 7, 447–50) are not contrasted like “Greek” and “Jew,” or “bondman” and “freeman.” Rather, they stand over against “Greek” when the latter is used in its cultural sense. The “barbarian” (cf. Rom 1:14; 1 Cor 14:11; Acts 28:2, 4) is the non-Greek, who did not speak that language (the Greeks themselves divided mankind into two main categories—Greeks and barbarians). Yet Paul’s apostolic ministry was directed to them both (Rom 1:14, “I am under obligation to both Greeks and barbarians [“Ἕλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους]). The “Scythian” represents the lowest kind of barbarian who was probably also a slave; the term was applied to tribes around the Black Sea from which was drawn a wretched slave class (Lightfoot, 216, cf. BAG, 758; Michel, *TDNT* 7, 449, 450, suggests the possibility of the Scythian being mentioned separately from the barbarian because of some special situation at Colossae; but against this see Lohse, 144). Josephus (Ap 2, 269) said: “they are little better than wild beasts” (they were occasionally figures of fun in Greek comedy because of their uncouth ways and speech, cf. Bruce, 276). But the gospel breaks down these cultural barriers, overcoming the offense which a Scythian might give to another’s natural sensibilities.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 188–189]

³⁶δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος. “Slave, free.” Likewise “in the realm of the new man” (Dibelius-Greeven, 42) distinctions of social position are irrelevant. A slave in the ancient world was, legally speaking, not a person but a piece of property, “a living tool” according to Aristotle (see below regarding Paul’s treatment of Onesimus). But in the Christian community the slave as well as the freeman was the brother for whom Christ died. The apostle is not speaking about some natural equality of all persons nor about a morality that is binding on all. When in Galatians 3:28 he says that in Christ “there is no male or female” he does not mean that the distinctive functions or capacities of men and women are abolished, for they like Greeks and Jews, slaves and free, continue to live in the various roles the word assigns them (see Bouttier, *NTS* 23 [1976–77] 1–19). But in Christ there is no inferiority of the one sex to the other, or one class to another; men and women of completely diverse origins are gathered together in unity in Christ through a common allegiance to their Lord. There is no difference in spiritual status between them.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 189]

³⁷Note the various listings by Paul in related texts in his writings:

Listing	Col. 3:11	Gal. 3:28	1 Cor. 12:13
neither Greek nor Jew	οὐκ ἔστιν Ἕλληνας καὶ Ἰουδαίους	οὐκ ἔστιν Ἰουδαίος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνας	εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνας
circumcised and uncircumcised	περιτομῆ καὶ ἀκροβυστία		
barbarian, Scythian	βάρβαρος, Σκύθης		
slave, free	δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος	οὐκ ἔστιν δοῦλος οὐδέ ἐλεύθερος	εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι
neither male nor female		ἔστιν ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ	

³⁸Extreme caution should be exercised, contrary to Dunn in the NIGTC, about drawing conclusions regarding the nature of the heresy in the Lycus Valley from these words. Dunn’s argument carries little or no weight given the distortion of the evidence here, as is illustrated by the above table. The way Paul sets up the lists argues only for both Jews and Gentiles in the believing community in the Lycus Valley, not for the false teachers advocating a turning to Judaism by the Gentiles in the church.

Here in Colossians the focus is obviously primarily on ethnic, cultural distinctions, as the first six items, four of them unique to this version, clearly indicate (pace MacDonald 103–4, 145). Even more striking is the fact that the first four all focus on the Jew-Gentile division — with even more emphasis than in Gal. 3:28, where that distinction is the principal issue in the letter. This confirms both the Jewish character of the threat to the Colossian church (with Lightfoot 214; pace Lohse, Colossians and Philemon 143 n. 70), and the earlier conclusion, that despite the absence of an explicit argument as in Galatians, what was at stake in Colossae also was an attempt (less forceful than in Galatia) to intimidate Gentile believers into admission that Jewish practice and worship (as in Colossae) provided a more effective access to knowledge of God (see also on 2:11, 16, 18, and 21).” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary*

only when it is built out of redeemed people who have a new nature as the foundation of their existence.³⁹ Without the life transforming presence of the risen Christ, no such humanity is remotely possible!

The final quality of this new humanity is set forth with the triumphant declaration, “but Christ is all and in all” (ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός). The center of this new humanity is Christ. And Christ is the sustainer of this new humanity by His indwelling presence.⁴⁰ In stark contrast to the dynamics that divide up people into differing -- and often hostile -- groups based on race, religion, and/or social status, Christ becomes the unifying center for redeemed humanity to come together in equality and mutual respect. He is indeed τὰ πάντα, “all things.” And He is ἐν πᾶσιν, “in all.” That is, He who lives in all the redeemed is the One who brings all things into unity.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Possible areas of application of this passage to our world today.

What a challenge we face as believers in Christ! In coming to Jesus as Savior we are leave the past behind. We are to shed every remnant of its life style. The new life style that replaces it will be described in 3:12-17. How we make that transition is clear. In our conversion God created us as a new people with a new nature that is modeled after the life of Christ. Our task is to allow this new person to emerge in our daily living under the leadership of God through Christ. The first step in this is a decisive decision to turn loose of that old life and its way of living.

What we experienced in conversion with the death of the old self and the birth of the new self must now be implemented into our daily living. The ‘putting to death’ and the ‘taking off’ reflect deliberate actions to shed the vestiges of the old pre-Christian lifestyle. The Aorist imperative verb expressions underscore the seriousness of this decision as a decisive action by believers. Failure to implement this reorientation of lifestyle reflects failure to have experienced the transforming presence of Christ at conversion, and thus we are left in the old pagan ways that are dooming us to the wrath of God. The old lifestyle is typified by sinful actions, attitudes, and speech that must be shed. Particularly important is to cease lying to one another. Such deception is wholly inconsistent with our new self that God created in us at conversion. The means to implementation is not self-effort or resolve. Rather it comes through submission to the absolute authority of God who implements a renewing process in both believers and the Christian community. Thus the new life of unity and godliness are products of God’s presence through Christ, not from human effort.

Additionally, the dissolving of artificial distinctions based on race, religion, or social status must be complete. In the community of believers, everyone stands on equal ground before God in spiritual status and ministry opportunity. While such barriers of division may prevail outside the church, they have absolutely no validity inside the community of faith.

on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 223-24.]

^{39c}“Where cultural differences exist, the gospel ignores them. Paul reckoned himself to be debtor ‘both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish’ (Rom. 1:14)—that is, to all sorts and conditions of men and women. Greeks divided the human race into two camps—Greeks and barbarians (those whose language was not Greek). As the area of Greek civilization spread, especially after the Roman conquest, when ‘captured Greece took her savage captor captive,’⁹⁶ so people like the Romans, who were not Greeks by nationality, came to be included in the wider Graeco-Roman civilization of the Mediterranean world. Outside this area of civilization were the barbarians, and among the barbarians the Scythians had for long been looked on as particularly outlandish. ‘Scythian’ is not set here in antithesis to ‘barbarian’; it intensifies the concept expressed by ‘barbarian.’ Since the Scythian invasion of the Fertile Crescent toward the end of the seventh century B.C.,⁹⁷ ‘Scythian’ had been a byword for uncultured barbarism. In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Scythian slaves did police duty in Athens, and Scythian policemen are figures of fun in Attic comedy because of their uncouth ways and speech.⁹⁸ But the gospel overrides cultural frontiers; they have no place in the Christian church.” [F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 149-50.]

⁴⁰“The concluding triumphant words, ‘but Christ is all and in all,’ contrast the centrality of Christ with the divisions that separate people in the world. Similar expressions are found at 1 Corinthians 15:28 (‘that God may be all in all’) and Ephesians 1:23 (‘the fullness of him who fills all in all’) where, in the former at least and possibly also the latter, the relationship of God himself to the cosmos is in view. Here, however, the phrase is applied to Christ. The καί (‘and’) suggests that both halves of the phrase are important (note Eph 4:6). The first half states in an emphatic way that Christ is ‘absolutely everything’ (see Moule, 121, 122), or ‘all that matters,’ while the words he is ‘in all’ (ἐν πᾶσιν), which in the light of the preceding statement of verse 11a should probably be regarded as masculine (rather than neuter), mean that he permeates and indwells all members of the new man, regardless of race, class or background (cf. Schnackenburg, *Schriften*, 408, and Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 159; note however Lohse, 145). Christ lives in those who believe (cf. Col 1:27; Gal 2:20; 4:19).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 189]

The huge challenge of this passage is the cleaning up of our lives by moving away from pagan living and the elimination of prejudicial barriers that divide up humanity. Were the church to successfully achieve these twin goals, a spiritual awakening of great proportions would explode inside Christianity.

- 1) How do you 'put to death' vices of the old non-Christian life?

- 2) Have you stripped out of your life the vices of paganism?

- 3) How truthful are you? Especially, to fellow Christians?

- 4) Have you overcome the false barriers of prejudice that divide people?