

April 26: Spiritual Metabolism (pt 3)

In chapter one, Paul lifted our eyes to the supremacy of Christ. He showed us that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the creator of all things, the one through whom all things exist and in whom all things hold together. He showed us that Christ is not a supporting figure in reality—He is the center of reality. He is not an accessory to life. He is the source, purpose, and sustaining power of all things. And that means every true biblical worldview must begin there. If Christ is not central in our thinking, then our thinking is already distorted.

Then in chapter two, Paul moved from Christ's supremacy to Christ's sufficiency. If chapter one answers the question, "Who is Christ?" then chapter two answers the question, "Do I need anything beyond Him?" And Paul's answer was emphatic: no. In Christ dwells all the fullness of deity bodily, and believers have been filled in Him. That means every counterfeit system—whether philosophy, legalism, mysticism, or self-made religion—ultimately fails because each one tries to offer what only Christ can provide. They may appear wise, disciplined, or spiritual, but they cannot transform the heart. Only Christ is sufficient. Now, in chapter three, Paul turns to the next necessary question: if Christ is supreme, and if Christ is sufficient, then how should those united to Him actually live?

That is where many believers struggle. We may affirm the truths of chapters one and two, yet still live with patterns of thought and behavior shaped more by the old world than by our union with Christ. We can say Christ is central while living self-centered lives. We can say Christ is sufficient while looking elsewhere for identity, peace, and meaning.

So chapter three is where doctrine becomes daily life. Where cognitive faith becomes functional faith. Where worldview moves from abstract conviction into lived reality. Paul is going to show us that the Christian life is not merely about avoiding sin or adding religious habits. It is about living from a new identity. It is about learning to think differently, desire differently, relate differently, and respond differently because we belong to Christ. In other words, chapters one and two tell us to see Christ rightly. Chapter three tells us to live accordingly.

And that matters for us, because spiritual maturity is not simply knowing true things about Christ. It is having those truths so deeply rooted in us that they begin to shape the way we see everything else. That is where Paul now takes us.

The Foundational Shift: Set Your Mind on the New Reality (3:1–4)

As we come to the opening verses of chapter three, Paul makes an important shift. In the first two chapters of this letter, he has labored to establish the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. He has shown us who Christ is, what Christ has accomplished, and why every counterfeit alternative ultimately fails. But now Paul moves from doctrine to implication.

He moves from what is true about Christ to what must now be true of those who belong to Him. And he begins with identity.

Verse 1: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

That opening phrase is foundational: ¹ If then you have been raised with Christ. Paul is not expressing uncertainty. He is assuming reality. This could be understood as “Since you have been raised with Christ.” If you belong to Christ by faith, then something decisive has happened to you. You are not merely forgiven while remaining essentially unchanged. You have been joined to Christ in His death and resurrection.

This is one of the central truths of the Christian life. Christianity is not primarily moral reform. It is not behavior modification. It is not taking the old self and making it slightly more respectable. Christianity begins with new life. Paul says similarly in Romans 6:4–5 that we were buried with Christ and raised so that we too might walk in newness of life. In Ephesians 2:4–6, he says God made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him. And in 2 Corinthians 5:17, we are told that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. That means your deepest identity is no longer determined by your past, your failures, your wounds, or your natural inclinations. Your deepest identity is now found in union with Christ.

And because that is true, Paul says a new orientation of life must follow: Seek the things that are above.

This can be misunderstood if we are not careful. Paul is not telling Christians to become detached from earthly responsibilities or to live in vague religious daydreaming. He is not calling us to escapism. He is calling us to interpret the world through a higher reality. “Above” is not primarily about location—it is about authority, rule, and ultimate perspective. It is where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. That phrase speaks of completed victory and present reign. Christ is seated because His redemptive work is finished. Christ is at the right hand of God because He rules in power and authority. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus unambiguously declares He possess all authority. He rules. So when Paul says to seek the things above, he is saying orient your desires, priorities, and pursuits around the supremacy and sufficiency of King Jesus.

This is why Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” It is why Paul says in Philippians 3:20 that our citizenship is in heaven. Most people live from ground level. They interpret life horizontally. Circumstances determine peace. Success determines identity. Comfort determines whether life is going well. But Paul calls believers to live vertically—to interpret life from the throne down, not from the ground up.

Then he intensifies the command in verse 2: ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Paul is not condemning created things or earthly responsibilities. He is confronting earthly-mindedness—a mindset trapped within this world's values and assumptions. A mind set only on earthly things becomes consumed with what is temporary, visible, and immediate. It evaluates life by comfort, recognition, possessions, control, and human approval. But the Christian mind is to be set on the unseen reality. It is to be governed by the reign of Christ, the promises of God, the values of the kingdom, and the certainty of what is coming. This is why worldview matters so much. Because whatever your mind is set upon will shape how you interpret everything else. If your mind is set on earthly security, you will be shaken when circumstances change. If your mind is set on human approval, you will be controlled by the opinions of others. If your mind is set on comfort, suffering will feel intolerable. But if your mind is set on Christ and His kingdom, you gain a stability the world cannot give and cannot take away.

Paul then explains why this mindset is fitting in verse 3: ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

You have died. The old realm, the old master, the old defining reality no longer has ultimate claim over you. Sin still wars against you, but it no longer owns you. The world still pressures you, but it no longer defines you. And now your life is hidden with Christ in God. That is one of the most comforting statements in this passage. Hidden does not mean absent. It means secure. It means protected and guarded. It means that what is most true about you is safely held in Christ.

Your identity is secure even when emotions fluctuate. Your future is secure even when circumstances feel uncertain. Your hope is secure even when others misunderstand you. Then Paul lifts our eyes one final time. Verse 4: ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Christ is not merely part of your life. Paul says Christ is your life. He is the source, meaning, center, and destiny of it. And one day what is now hidden will be revealed. What is now partial will be complete. What is now walked by faith will be seen in glory. This future hope is meant to transform the present. We live in the seen reality while tethered to the unseen. Titus 2:13 calls us to wait for our blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:2–3 says that when He appears we shall be like Him, and everyone who has this hope purifies himself.

When you know where your life is headed, you can endure what meets you now. When you know glory is coming, suffering loses its power to define the story. When you know Christ will appear, faithfulness today becomes purposeful. Paul's opening call in chapter three is foundational: live in light of the new reality that is already yours in Christ. What is this reality?

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- You have died with Christ.
- You have been raised with Christ.
- Your life is hidden with Christ.
- You will appear with Christ.
- So set your mind on Christ.

Because the way you see reality, both the seen and the unseen, will shape the way you live today.

The Response: Put to Death the Old Life (3:5–9)

Having established the believer's new identity in Christ, Paul now moves immediately to the necessary consequence of that identity. If you have been raised with Christ, if your life is hidden with Him, if your future is bound up with His appearing in glory, then the old life can no longer be treated as if it still belongs to you.

This is why verse 5 begins with urgency: ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you. Notice the language Paul uses. He does not say manage it, tolerate it, negotiate with it, or keep it under better control. He says kill it with extreme prejudice. This is strong language because sin is not a harmless weakness. It is not morally neutral. It is not something to be domesticated. Sin is a living rebellion within us that seeks to reclaim territory Christ has redeemed. So Paul says hate it, despise it, and kill it!

Paul says something similar in Romans 8:13: If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Jesus uses equally serious language in Matthew 5:29–30 when He speaks of tearing out an eye or cutting off a hand rather than being ruled by sin. The point is not self-harm, but ruthless seriousness. Sin must be dealt with decisively, not danced around, avoided, managed, or rebranded because left unchecked, it can lead to drift.

Then Paul names specific sins: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. He begins with sins of desire and sexuality because these are deeply connected to worship. Sexual immorality is desire pursued outside God's design. Impurity speaks of moral uncleanness. Passion and evil desire point to disordered cravings that seek satisfaction apart from God. Then Paul adds covetousness and says it is idolatry. That is revealing. Coveting is not merely wanting something someone has; it is wanting that thing so much that it begins to function as a god. It becomes the thing you believe you need in order to be happy, healthy, whole, and if it's not God Almighty, it's an idol. This is why the tenth commandment in Exodus 20:17 forbids coveting. It exposes that sin is not merely external behavior—it is misplaced worship in the heart. And that means these sins are not random moral failures. They are worldview issues. They reveal what we believe will satisfy us.

Paul then adds sober weight in verse 6: ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. That is language modern people often resist, but Scripture speaks of it plainly. God's wrath

is not uncontrolled anger. It is His holy and settled opposition to evil. It is the necessary response of a righteous God to all that distorts, corrupts, and destroys what He made. Ephesians 5:5–6 says similar things, warning that because of such sins the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Nahum 1:2–3 reminds us that the Lord is just and will not clear the guilty.

Paul is reminding believers that sin is serious because God is holy. He's not saying our remaining sin struggles disqualify. Why? Because we are His sons and daughters and no longer belong to the world. He says in verse 7: ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. That phrase matters. Once walked. Once lived. Paul anticipates a changed heart because of Christ, so he reminds them of their former identity, not to shame them, but to clarify that this is no longer who they are. Sin may still tempt you, but it no longer defines you.

But Paul is not finished. Sin is not only sensual—it is also relational. Verse 8: ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Many people recognize sexual sin as serious while minimizing relational sin. Paul does not make that mistake. Anger that festers, wrath that erupts, malice that desires harm, slander that wounds reputations, obscene or corrupt speech that degrades others—these too belong to the old self.

James 1:19–20 tells us that human anger does not produce the righteousness of God. Ephesians 4:29–31 commands believers to put away corrupting talk, bitterness, wrath, anger, and slander. Proverbs 12:22 says lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. How we treat each other matters greatly to the Lord. Then Paul concludes in verse 9: ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices. Lying destroys trust because it opposes the God of truth. It belongs to the old self, the person you once were apart from Christ.

And notice again how Paul motivates obedience. He does not merely say, “Stop lying because it is wrong.” He says stop lying because you have put off the old self. In other words, stop living like someone you no longer are. That is how the gospel transforms obedience. The commands are rooted in identity. So what is Paul teaching us here? The Christian life is not passive coexistence with sin; it is active warfare against it. Grace does not make us casual about sin—it makes us serious about it, because Christ died to free us from it. And this warfare is not only against outward acts, but inward loves, hidden desires, and relational patterns that contradict our new life in Christ.

So the question becomes personal: what in your life are you tolerating that God says must be put to death? What desires are you feeding that should be starved? What habits of speech or anger are you excusing because they feel normal?

Because whatever you refuse to kill in your old self will continue to shape you.

The call is clear. You have been raised with Christ. Therefore, put to death what belongs to the grave.

Put On Christlike Character in Community (3:10–14)

After telling believers to put off the old self and its practices, Paul now turns to what has replaced it. Christianity is not simply about removing bad behavior. It is not just subtraction. God does not strip away the old life in order to leave us empty. He puts something new in its place. Verse 10: ...¹⁰ and put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

That statement tells us something crucial about sanctification. The new self is not something we create. It is something we have already put on in Christ. And yet it is also “being renewed.” In other words, there is both a decisive reality and an ongoing process. In Christ, you are new. But that newness is also being worked out progressively in the way you think, desire, and choose.

And notice how Paul describes that renewal: it is “being renewed in knowledge.” That matters because the goal is never behavioral change. It is renewal at the level of understanding. Your mind must be reshaped. Your way of seeing reality must be reformed. The old self was governed by darkness, distortion, and falsehood. The new self is renewed through true knowledge—knowledge of God, knowledge of Christ, knowledge of who you now are. This takes us back to the beginning, literally, to Genesis 1:27, where humanity was created in the image of God.

Paul is saying that in Christ, that image is being restored. The fall distorted it, sin corrupted it, but redemption begins to remake us after the image of our Creator. So sanctification is returning to as God intended. This is a profound worldview correction. The world tells us that change comes by looking deeper into ourselves, expressing ourselves more fully, and defining ourselves on our own terms. But Paul says renewal happens not by self-creation, but by being remade according to the image of the One who created us. We do not become whole by inventing identity. We become whole by being restored in Christ.

Then Paul makes the implications unmistakably communal in verse 11:¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. This is not Paul saying those distinctions vanish in every earthly sense. Ethnic background, social location, and cultural history still exist. But they no longer function as ultimate identity markers within the people of God. They no longer determine worth, standing, or belonging. Why? Because Christ is all.

He is supreme over every category that once divided people. He is the center, the substance, the defining reality. And He is “in all”—dwelling in all who belong to Him. That means the church is a new humanity. Old hostilities, old pride, old divisions, old hierarchies no longer have the final word. Galatians 3:28 makes this same point: in Christ

there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Him. Ephesians 2:14–16 says Christ Himself is our peace, who has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and created one new man in place of the two.

Which means this renewal is not merely personal—it is corporate. Christ is forming a people whose shared identity in Him is deeper than every earthly distinction. And that means the new self is not just about your private spiritual life. It changes how you see other believers. It changes how you think about status, background, culture, and worth. In Christ, the most important thing about you is no longer what category you belong to by nature, but that you belong to Him by grace.

So Paul's point is clear: the new self is being renewed in true knowledge, restored in the image of God, and expressed in a new humanity where Christ defines everything. That is not a small adjustment. That is a completely new way of seeing yourself, others, and the church.

Paul moves from what must be removed to what must be worn and practiced within the family of God: ¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved... That opening phrase is deeply important. Before Paul gives commands, he reminds them who they are. This is the consistent pattern of the gospel. Identity comes before imperatives. Grace comes before obedience. God does not say, "Become lovable, then I will love you." He says, "You are chosen, holy, and beloved—therefore live accordingly."

What do we put on? Back to verse 12: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. This is Christlike character expressed relationally. Compassionate hearts speak of tenderness toward the weakness and suffering of others. Kindness is sacrificially serving others when there's no benefit for you. Humility declares there's no service you consider beneath you. Meekness is often misunderstood as weakness, but biblically it is strength under control. Patience is long-suffering endurance with difficult people and difficult circumstances. It is the willingness to absorb inconvenience without resentment.

These virtues do not arise naturally from the fallen heart. Our instincts tend toward self-protection, impatience, pride, and retaliation. That is why Paul says these must be put on. They are cultivated intentionally as we submit to the Spirit and imitate Christ. Then Paul makes it even more practical in verse 13: ... ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

This is where Christian maturity becomes visible. It is easy to speak of grace in theory. It is much harder to practice grace in community. "Bearing with one another" means enduring one another's weaknesses, quirks, immaturities, and limitations. It means recognizing that life together in the church involves real sinners in process. It means refusing to demand perfection from others while expecting patience for ourselves.

And then Paul addresses complaints—real offenses, real hurts, real grievances. He does not pretend those things do not exist. Instead, he commands forgiveness. And he gives the measure of that forgiveness: “as the Lord has forgiven you.” That changes everything. We do not forgive because the offense was small. We do not forgive because the other person earned it. We forgive because we ourselves have been forgiven an immeasurable debt. This does not mean forgiveness is always easy. Some wounds run deep. But it does mean that bitterness cannot be our resting place. The forgiven are called to become forgiving people.

Then Paul reaches the climax in verse 14: ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Love is not one virtue among many. It is the virtue that gives life and coherence to all the others. Compassion without love becomes sentimentality. Truth without love becomes harshness. Patience without love becomes mere tolerance. But love binds them together into maturity.

Our culture often defines maturity by achievement, intelligence, independence, or influence. But Paul defines maturity relationally. A mature Christian is not merely informed, but loving. Not merely disciplined, but compassionate. Not merely doctrinally precise, but humble, patient, and forgiving. Why? Because this is what Christ is like.

Let Christ Rule Within the Church (3:15–17)

Paul now brings this section of the chapter to its culmination. He has spoken about new identity, the putting to death of sin, and the putting on of Christlike character. But now he shows what holds all of this together in the daily life of believers and in the shared life of the church.

The question becomes: what governs a people who belong to Christ? His answer is clear. Christ Himself must rule through His peace, His Word, and His name. Verse 15 begins: ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. That phrase “the peace of Christ” can be understood in two connected ways. It includes the peace Christ gives—the reconciliation with God secured through His cross. Those who were once alienated have now been brought near. But it also includes the peace that flows from belonging to Him—the settled steadiness that comes when life is submitted to His rule. As I’ve said many times in this class, we can have peace with God because of our relational standing before Him while forfeiting the peace of God because of our rebelliousness.

Paul says this peace is to “rule” in your hearts. That word was used for an umpire or arbitrator, one who decides what prevails. In other words, the peace of Christ is to have governing rulership in the inner life of believers and in the relational life of the church. The peace of Christ settles conflicts, quiets anxious striving, and controls responses. This does not mean believers never wrestle with fear or tension. It means those things are not meant to be the ruling authority. Christ’s peace is. Philippians 4:6–7 says that as we bring our

concerns to God in prayer, the peace of God guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Isaiah 26:3 says God keeps in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed on Him. Ephesians 4:3 calls believers to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And notice Paul says they were called to this peace “in one body.” This is not merely individual tranquility. It is communal harmony. The church is not a collection of isolated spiritual consumers. It is one body under one Head. Therefore, peace must shape how believers relate to one another. Then Paul adds a short but repeated command: “And be thankful.”

Gratitude appears again and again in Colossians because thanklessness is fertile soil for discontent, pride, and division. A thankful heart recognizes grace, receives gifts humbly, and resists the entitlement that so easily fractures relationships. Paul then moves to the second governing reality in verse 16: ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...

This is one of the richest statements in the passage. The “word of Christ” likely includes both the message about Christ and the teaching that comes from Christ. It is the gospel truth, the apostolic teaching, the revealed Word centered in Him. And Paul says it is to dwell in you richly. Not visit occasionally. Not remain on the surface. Not be reserved for Sunday morning. It is to make its home among God’s people abundantly. This is how Christ rules His church—not only through inner peace, but through His living Word saturating the community.

And notice that Paul does not describe Scripture as a private possession only. It is a corporate reality. The Word dwells among the people of God. How does that happen? “Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

The church is a Word-shaped community. Teaching instructs what is true. Admonishing warns and corrects what is false or harmful. Singing embeds truth into the affections. Worship is not filler or transition—it is formative. We sing because truth set to praise helps it sink deeper into the heart. This means church life is far more than attendance. It is mutual ministry. Believers are meant to strengthen one another through truth-filled words, corrective love, and worship that exalts Christ.

Then Paul reaches the sweeping conclusion in verse 17: ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Folks, this is total-life discipleship. Whatever you do. Not only explicitly religious activities. Not only church gatherings or devotional moments. Words and deeds. Public life and private life. Work and rest. Family life and church life. Decisions, conversations, attitudes, responsibilities. All of it is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. To act in His name means under His authority, in alignment with His character, for the sake of His honor. It means asking not merely, “Can I do this?” but, “Does this glorify Christ?”

And once again Paul ends with thanksgiving. Gratitude is not a side note—it is the atmosphere of the Christian life. Those who know they have received mercy, reconciliation, and new life in Christ become people marked by thanks. So what is Paul showing us? A church shaped by Christ is governed by His peace, saturated with His Word, and devoted to His glory.

So the practical question is searching: what rules your heart right now? Fear or Christ's peace? Cultural voices or Christ's Word? Self-interest or Christ's glory? Because something is always ruling.

Living the New Reality in an Old World

Let's step back for a moment. Paul has given us far more than a list of commands. He has given us a complete vision for how believers are meant to live in the world because of who they now are in Christ. He has shown us that the Christian life begins with identity. We have been raised with Christ. Our lives are hidden with Him. Our future is bound up with His appearing in glory. That means we are not trying to create ourselves—we are learning to live from a new reality already given to us by grace.

And from that identity flows a new way of life. We are called to put to death what belongs to the old self. We are called to put on the character of Christ. And we are called to submit to Christ's rule. This is where Paul's teaching collides directly with the assumptions of the world around us. The modern world says identity is something you discover by looking inward, constructing yourself, and expressing your desires. Scripture says identity is something you receive in union with Christ. You do not find yourself by turning inward. You find yourself by belonging to Him.

The world says freedom means indulging desire, removing restraints, and following whatever feels authentic. Scripture says freedom means putting sin to death and no longer being enslaved to what destroys you. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever you want. It is the power to become what God created you to be.

The world says community is transactional. People are valuable as long as they meet needs, affirm preferences, or remain useful. Scripture says community is covenantal. We bear with one another, forgive one another, and love one another because Christ has loved us.

The world says peace comes through control—control your environment, your future, your image, your outcomes. Scripture says peace comes when Christ rules all areas of your heart.

The world says truth is self-created, personalized, and fluid. Scripture says let the Word of Christ dwell richly among you. Truth is not invented by us. It is received from God and meant to shape every part of life.

And this means Colossians 3 is not merely about morality. It is about worldview. It is about how you interpret reality and therefore how you live within it. So the final question is not simply, “What should I do differently this week?” The deeper question is, “Where am I still thinking like the old world instead of living from the new one?”

Where are you still trying to construct an identity Christ has already given you?

Where are you still calling bondage freedom?

Where are you treating people transactionally instead of sacrificially?

Where are you grasping for control instead of yielding to Christ’s peace?

Where are you absorbing the world’s voices more than letting Christ’s Word dwell richly in you? Because transformation does not happen merely by hearing commands. It happens when truth reshapes the way you see everything.