

CHAPTER 3

I. The apostle exhorts us to set our hearts upon heaven and take them off from this world (v. 1-4).

II. He exhorts to the mortification of sin, in the various instances of it (v. 5-11).

III. He earnestly presses to mutual love and compassion (v. 12-17). And concludes with exhortations to relative duties, of wives and husbands, parents and children, masters and servants (v. 18-25).

COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The apostle, having described our privileges by Christ in the former part of the epistle, and our discharge from the yoke of the ceremonial law, comes here to press upon us our duty as inferred thence. Though we are made free from the obligation of the ceremonial law, it does not therefore follow that we may live as we list. We must walk the more closely with God in all the instances of evangelical obedience. He begins with exhorting them to set their hearts on heaven, and take them off from this world: *If you then have risen with Christ*. It is our privilege that we have risen with Christ; that is, have benefit by the resurrection of Christ, and by virtue of our union and communion with him are justified and sanctified, and shall be glorified. Hence he infers that we must *seek those things which are above*. We must mind the concerns of another world more than the concerns of this. We must make heaven our scope and aim, seek the favour of God above, keep up our communion with the upper world by faith, and hope, and holy love, and make it our constant care and business to secure our title to and qualifications for the heavenly bliss. And the reason is because *Christ sits at the right hand of God*. He who is our best friend and our head is advanced to the highest dignity and honour in heaven, and has gone before to secure to us the heavenly happiness; and therefore we should seek and secure what he has purchased at so vast an expense, and is taking so much care about. We must live such a life as

Christ lived here on earth and lives now in heaven, according to our capacities.

I. He explains this duty (v. 2): *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.* Observe, To seek heavenly things is to set our affections upon them, to love them and let our desires be towards them. Upon the wings of affection the heart soars upwards, and is carried forth towards spiritual and divine objects. We must acquaint ourselves with them, esteem them above all other things, and lay out ourselves in preparation for the enjoyment of them. David gave this proof of his *loving the house of God*, that he diligently sought after it, and prepared for it, ^{<1274>}Psalm 27:4. This is to be spiritually minded (^{<406>}Romans 8:6), and to *seek and desire a better country, that is, a heavenly*, ^{<8114>}Hebrews 11:14, 16. *Things on earth* are here set in opposition to *things above*. We must not dote upon them, nor expect too much from them, that we may set our affections on heaven; for heaven and earth are contrary one to the other, and a supreme regard to both is inconsistent; and the prevalence of our affection to one will proportionably weaken and abate our affection to the other.

II. He assigns three reasons for this, v. 3, 4.

1. That we are dead; that is, to present things, and as our portion. We are so in profession and obligation; for we are *buried with Christ, and planted into the likeness of his death*. Every Christian is *crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto him*, ^{<414>}Galatians 6:14. And if we are dead to the earth, and have renounced it as our happiness, it is absurd for us to *set our affections* upon it, and *seek* it. We should be like a dead thing to it, unmoved and unaffected towards it.

2. Our true life lies in the other world: *You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*, v. 3. The new man has its livelihood thence. It is born and nourished from above; and the perfection of its life is reserved for that state. It is *hid with Christ*; not hid from us only, in point of secrecy, but hid for us, denoting security. The life of a Christian *is hid with Christ*. *Because I live you shall live also*, ^{<349>}John 14:19. Christ is at present a hidden Christ, or one *whom we have not seen*; but this is our comfort, that our *life is hid with him*, and laid up safely with him. As we have reason to *love him whom we have not seen* (^{<408>}1 Peter 1:8), so we may take the comfort of a happiness out of sight, and *reserved in heaven for us*.

3. Because at the second coming of Christ we hope for the perfection of our happiness. If we live a life of Christian purity and devotion now, *when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory*, v. 4. Observe,

(1.) Christ is a believer's life. *I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me*, ^{<472>}Galatians 2:20. He is the principle and end of the Christian's life. He lives *in us* by his Spirit, and we live to him in all we do. *To me to live is Christ*, ^{<502>}Philippians 1:21.

(2.) Christ will appear again. He is now *hid*; and the *heavens must contain* him; but he will appear in all the pomp of the upper world, with his *holy angels*, and in *his own glory and his Father's glory*, ^{<488>}Mark 8:38; ^{<496>}Luke 9:26.

(3.) We shall then appear with him in glory. It will be his glory to have his redeemed with him; he will come to be glorified in his saints (^{<500>}2 Thessalonians 1:10); and it will be their glory to come with him, and be with him for ever. At the second coming of Christ there will be a general meeting of all the saints; and those whose life is now *hid with Christ* shall then appear with Christ in that glory which he himself enjoys, ^{<474>}John 17:24. Do we look for such a happiness, and should we not set our affections upon that world, and live above this? What is there here to make us fond of it? What is there not there to draw our hearts to it? Our head is there, our home is there, our treasure is there, and we hope to be there for ever.

^{<515>}COLOSSIANS 3:5-7

NECESSITY OF MORTIFYING SIN

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

are upon the earth; either the members of the body, which are the earthly part of us, and were *curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth* (^{<AD>}Psalm 139:15), or the corrupt affections of the mind, which lead us to earthly things, the members of the body of death, ^{<RT>}Romans 7:24. He specifies,

I. The lusts of the flesh, for which they were before so very remarkable: *Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence* — the various workings of the carnal appetites and fleshly impurities, which they indulged in their former course of life, and which were so contrary to the Christian state and the heavenly hope.

II. The love of the world: *And covetousness, which is idolatry*; that is, an inordinate love of present good and outward enjoyments, which proceeds from too high a value in the mind, puts upon too eager a pursuit, hinders the proper use and enjoyment of them, and creates anxious fear and immoderate sorrow for the loss of them. Observe, Covetousness is spiritual idolatry: it is the giving of that love and regard to worldly wealth which are due to God only, and carries a greater degree of malignity in it, and is more highly provoking to God, than is commonly thought. And it is very observable that among all the instances of sin which good men are recorded in the scripture to have fallen into (and there is scarcely any but some or other, in one or other part of their life, have fallen into) there is no instance in all the scripture of any good man charged with covetousness. He proceeds to show how necessary it is to mortify sins, v. 6, 7.

1. Because, if we do not kill them, they will kill us: *For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience*, v. 6. See what we are all by nature more or less: we are *children of disobedience*: not only disobedient children, but under the power of sin and naturally prone to disobey. *The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies*, ^{<SB>}Psalm 58:3. And, being children of disobedience, we are *children of wrath*, ^{<EB>}Ephesians 2:3. The wrath of God comes upon all the children of disobedience. Those who do not obey the precepts of the law incur the penalties of it. The sins he mentions were their sins in their heathen and idolatrous state, and they were then especially the children of disobedience; and yet these sins brought judgments upon them, and exposed them to the wrath of God.

2. We should mortify these sins because they have lived in us: *In which you also walked some time, when you lived in them*, v. 7. Observe, The consideration that we have formerly lived in sin is a good argument why we should now forsake it. We have walked in by-paths, therefore let us walk in them no more. *If I have done iniquity, I will do no more*, ~~Job~~ Job 34:32. The time past our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, ~~1 Peter~~ 1 Peter 4:3. — *When you lived among those who did such things* (so some understand it), then you walked in those evil practices. It is a hard thing to live among those who do the works of darkness and not have fellowship with them, as it is to walk in the mire and contract no soil. Let us keep out of the way of evil-doers.

~~Colossians~~ COLOSSIANS 3:8-11

NECESSITY OF MORTIFYING SIN

As we are to mortify inordinate appetites, so we are to mortify inordinate passions (v. 8): *But now you also put off all these, anger wrath, malice*; for these are contrary to the design of the gospel, as well as grosser impurities; and, though they are more spiritual wickedness, have not less malignity in them. The gospel religion introduces a change of the higher as well as the lower powers of the soul, and supports the dominion of right reason and conscience over appetite and passion. Anger and wrath are bad, but malice is worse, because it is more rooted and deliberate; it is anger heightened and settled. And, as the corrupt principles in the heart must be cut off, so the product of them in the tongue; as *blasphemy*, which seems there to mean, not so much speaking ill of God as speaking ill of men, giving ill language to them, or raising ill reports of them, and injuring their good name by any evil arts, — *filthy communication*, that is, all lewd and wanton discourse, which comes from a polluted mind in the speaker and propagates the same defilements in the hearers, — and lying: *Lie not one to another* (v. 9), for it is contrary both to the law of truth and the law of love, it is both unjust and unkind, and naturally tends to destroy all faith and friendship among mankind. Lying makes us like the devil (who is the *father of lies*), and is a prime part of the devil's image upon our souls; and therefore we are cautioned against this sin by this general reason: *Seeing you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man,*

v. 10. The consideration that we have by profession put away sin and espoused the cause and interest of Christ, that we have renounced all sin and stand engaged to Christ, should fortify us against this sin of lying. Those who have put off the old man have put it off with its deeds; and those who have put on the new man must put on all its deeds — not only espouse good principles but act them in a good conversation. The new man is said to be *renewed in knowledge*, because an ignorant soul cannot be a good soul. Without knowledge the heart cannot be good, ^{}Proverbs 19:2. The grace of God works upon the will and affections by renewing the understanding. Light is the first thing in the new creation, as it was in the first: *after the image of him who created him*. It was the honour of man in innocence that he was made after the image of God; but that image was defaced and lost by sin, and is renewed by sanctifying grace: so that a renewed soul is something like what Adam was in the day he was created. In the privilege and duty of sanctification *there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free*, v. 11. There is now no difference arising from different country or different condition and circumstance of life: it is as much the duty of the one as of the other to be holy, and as much the privilege of the one as of the other to receive from God the grace to be so. Christ came to take down all partition-walls, that all might stand on the same level before God, both in duty and privilege. And for this reason, because *Christ is all in all*. Christ is a Christian's all, his only Lord and Saviour, and all his hope and happiness. And to those who are sanctified, one as well as another and whatever they are in other respects, he is *all in all*, the *Alpha and Omega*, the *beginning and the end*: he is all in all things to them.

^{}COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

LOVE RECOMMENDED

The apostle proceeds to exhort to mutual love and compassion: *Put on therefore bowels of mercy*, v. 12. We must not only put off anger and wrath (as v. 8), but we must put on compassion and kindness; not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; not only not do hurt to any, but do what good we can to all.

I. The argument here used to enforce the exhortation is very affecting: *Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved.* Observe,

1. Those who are holy are the elect of God; and those who are the elect of God, and holy, are beloved — beloved of God, and ought to be so of all men.

2. Those who are the elect of God, holy and beloved, ought to conduct themselves in every thing as becomes them, and so as not to lose the credit of their holiness, nor the comfort of their being chosen and beloved. It becomes those who are holy towards God to be lowly and loving towards all men. Observe, What we must put on in particular.

(1.) Compassion towards the miserable: *Bowels of mercy*, the tenderest mercies. Those who owe so much to mercy ought to be merciful to all who are proper objects of mercy. *Be you merciful, as your Father is merciful,* ^{<416>}Luke 6:36.

(2.) *Kindness* towards our friends, and those who love us. A courteous disposition becomes the elect of God; for the design of the gospel is not only to soften the minds of men, but to sweeten them, and to promote friendship among men as well as reconciliation with God.

(3.) *Humbleness of mind*, in submission to those above us, and condescension to those below us. There must not only be a humble demeanour, but a humble mind. *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart,* ^{<417>}Matthew 11:29.

(4.) *Meekness* towards those who have provoked us, or been any way injurious to us. We must not be transported into any indecency by our resentment of indignities and neglects: but must prudently bridle our own anger, and patiently bear the anger of others.

(5.) *Long-suffering* towards those who continue to provoke us. *Charity suffereth long, as well as is kind,* ^{<418>}1 Corinthians 13:4. Many can bear a short provocation who are weary of bearing when it grows long. But we must suffer long both the injuries of men and the rebukes of divine Providence. If God is long-suffering to us, under all our provocations of him, we should exercise long-suffering to others in like cases.

(6.) Mutual forbearance, in consideration of the infirmities and deficiencies under which we all labour: *Forbearing one another.* We have

all of us something which needs to be borne with, and this is a good reason why we should bear with others in what is disagreeable to us. We need the same good turn from others which we are bound to show them.

(7.) A readiness to forgive injuries: *Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.* While we are in this world, where there is so much corruption in our hearts, and so much occasion of difference and contention, quarrels will sometimes happen, even among the elect of God, who are holy and beloved, as Paul and Barnabas had a *sharp contention, which parted them asunder one from the other* (^{<415>}Acts 15:39), and Paul and Peter, ^{<424>}Galatians 2:14. But it is our duty to forgive one another in such cases; not to bear any grudge, but put up with the affront and pass it by. And the reason is: *Even as Christ forgave you, so also do you.* The consideration that we are forgiven by Christ so many offences is a good reason why we should forgive others. It is an argument of the divinity of Christ that he had *power on earth to forgive sins*; and it is a branch of his example which we are obliged to follow, if we ourselves would be forgiven. *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,* ^{<412>}Matthew 6:12.

II. In order to all this, we are exhorted here to several things: —

1. To clothe ourselves with love (v. 14): *Above all things put on charity: epi pasi de toutois* — *over all things.* Let this be the upper garment, the robe, the livery, the mark of our dignity and distinction. Or, Let this be principal and chief, as the whole sum and abstract of the second table. *Add to faith virtue, and to brotherly-kindness charity,* ^{<415>}2 Peter 1:5-7. He lays the foundation in faith, and the top-stone in charity, *which is the bond of perfectness*, the cement and centre of all happy society. Christian unity consists of unanimity and mutual love.

2. To submit ourselves to the government of the *peace of God* (v. 15): *Let the peace of God rule in your hearts*, that is, God's being at peace with you, and the comfortable sense of his acceptance and favour: or, a disposition to peace among yourselves, a peaceable spirit, that keeps the peace, and makes peace. This is called the *peace of God*, because it is of his working in all who are his. *The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace,* ^{<417>}Romans 14:17. “Let this peace *rule in your heart* — prevail and govern there, or as an umpire decide all matters of difference among you.” — *To which you are called in one body.* We are called to this peace, to

peace with God as our privilege and peace with our brethren as our duty. Being united in one body, we are called to be at peace one with another, as the members of the natural body; for *we are the body of Christ, and members in particular*, ~~417~~ 1 Corinthians 12:27. To preserve in us this peaceable disposition, we must be thankful. The work of thanksgiving to God is such a sweet and pleasant work that it will help to make us sweet and pleasant towards all men. “Instead of envying one another upon account of any particular favours and excellence, be thankful for his mercies, which are common to all of you.”

3. To let the *word of Christ dwell in us richly*, v. 16. The gospel is the word of Christ, which has come to us; but that is not enough, it must dwell in us, or *keep house* — *enoikeito*, not as a servant in a family, who is under another's control, but as a master, who has a right to prescribe to and direct all under his roof. We must take our instructions and directions from it, and our portion of meat and strength, of grace and comfort, in due season, as from the *master of the household*. It must dwell in us; that is, be always ready and at hand to us in every thing, and have its due influence and use. We must be familiarly acquainted with it, and *know it for our good*, ~~417~~ Job 5:27. It must dwell in us richly: not only keep house in our hearts, but keep a good house. Many have the word of Christ dwelling in them, but it dwells in them but poorly; it has no mighty force and influence upon them. Then the soul prospers when the word of God *dwells in us richly*, when we have abundance of it in us, and are full of the scriptures and of the grace of Christ. And this in all wisdom. The proper office of wisdom is to apply what we know to ourselves, for our own direction. The word of Christ must dwell in us, not in all notion and speculation, to make us doctors, but in all wisdom, to make us good Christians, and enable us to conduct ourselves in every thing as becomes Wisdom's children.

4. To teach and admonish one another. This would contribute very much to our furtherance in all grace; for we sharpen ourselves by quickening others, and improve our knowledge by communicating it for their edification. We must *admonish one another in psalms and hymns*. Observe, Singing of psalms is a gospel ordinance: *psalmois kai hymnois kai odais* — the Psalms of David, and spiritual hymns and odes, collected out of the scripture, and suited to special occasions, instead of their lewd and profane songs in their idolatrous worship. Religious poesy seems countenanced by these expressions and is capable of great edification. But,

when we sing psalms, we make no melody unless we sing with grace in our hearts, unless we are suitably affected with what we sing and go along in it with true devotion and understanding. Singing of psalms is a teaching ordinance as well as a praising ordinance; and we are not only to quicken and encourage ourselves, but to *teach and admonish one another*, mutually excite our affections, and convey instructions.

5. All must be done in the name of Christ (v. 17): *And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*, according to his command and in compliance with his authority, by strength derived from him, with an eye to his glory, and depending upon his merit for the acceptance of what is good and the pardon of what is amiss, *Giving thanks to God and the Father by him*. Observe,

(1.) We must give thanks in all things; whatsoever we do, we must still give thanks, ^{<480>}Ephesians 5:20, *Giving thanks always for all things*.

(2.) The Lord Jesus must be the Mediator of our praises as well as of our prayers. *We give thanks to God and the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, ^{<480>}Ephesians 5:20. Those who do all things in Christ's name will never want matter of thanksgiving to God, even the Father.

^{<588>}COLOSSIANS 3:18-25

RELATIVE DUTIES

The apostle concludes the chapter with exhortations to relative duties, as before in the epistle to the Ephesians. The epistles which are most taken up in displaying the glory of divine grace, and magnifying the Lord Jesus, are the most particular and distinct in pressing the duties of the several relations. We must never separate the privileges and duties of the gospel religion.

I. He begins with the duties of wives and husbands (v. 18): *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord*. Submission is the duty of wives, *hypotassesthe*. It is the same word which is used to express our duty to magistrates (^{<581>}Romans 13:1, *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers*), and is expressed by subjection and reverence, ^{<480>}Ephesians 5:24, 33. The reason is that *Adam was first formed, then*

Eve: and Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression, ^{<4123>}1 Timothy 2:13, 14. He was first in the creation and last in the transgression. The *head of the woman is the man; and the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man; neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man,* ^{<4113>}1 Corinthians 11:3, 8, 9. It is agreeable to the order of nature and the reason of things, as well as the appointment and will of God. But then it is submission, not to a rigorous lord or absolute tyrant, who may do his will and is without restraints, but to a husband, and to her own husband, who stands in the nearest relation, and is under strict engagements to proper duty too. And *this is fit in the Lord,* it is becoming the relation, and what they are bound in duty to do, as an instance of obedience to the authority and law of Christ. On the other hand, *husbands must love their wives, and not be bitter against them,* v. 19. They must love them with tender and faithful affection, as Christ loved the church, and as their own bodies, and even as themselves (^{<4125>}Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33), with a love peculiar to the nearest relation and the greatest comfort and blessing of life. And they must not be bitter against them, not use them unkindly, with harsh language or severe treatment, but be kind and obliging to them in all things; for the *woman was made for the man, neither is the man without the woman, and the man also is by the woman,* ^{<4119>}1 Corinthians 11:9, 11, 12.

II. The duties of children and parents: *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord,* v. 20. They must be willing to do all their lawful commands, and be at their direction and disposal; as those who have a natural right and are fitter to direct them than themselves. The apostle (^{<4122>}Ephesians 6:2) requires them to honour as well as obey their parents; they must esteem them and think honourably of them, as the obedience of their lives must proceed from the esteem and opinion of their minds. And this is *well-pleasing to God,* or acceptable to him; for it is the *first commandment with promise* (^{<4122>}Ephesians 6:2), with an explicit promise annexed to it, namely, *That it shall be well with them, and they shall live long on the earth.* Dutiful children are the most likely to prosper in the world and enjoy long life. And parents must be tender, as well as children obedient (v. 21): *“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.* Let not your authority over them be exercised with rigour and severity, but with kindness and gentleness, lest you raise their passions and discourage them in their duty, and by holding the reins too tight make them fly out with greater fierceness.” The bad

temper and example of imprudent parents often prove a great hindrance to their children and a stumbling-block in their way; see ^{<404>}Ephesians 6:4. And it is by the tenderness of parents, and dutifulness of children, that God ordinarily furnishes his church with a seed to serve him, and propagates religion from age to age.

III. Servants and masters: *Servants, obey your masters in all things according to the flesh*, v. 22. Servants must do the duty of the relation in which they stand, and obey their master's commands in *all things* which are consistent with their duty to God their heavenly Master. *Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers* — not only when their master's eye is upon them, but when they are from under their master's eye. They must be both just and diligent. *In singleness of heart, fearing God* — without selfish designs, or hypocrisy and disguise, as those who fear God and stand in awe of him. Observe, The fear of God ruling in the heart will make people good in every relation. Servants who fear God will be just and faithful when they are from under their master's eye, because they know they are under the eye of God. See ^{<403>}Genesis 20:11, *Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place.* ^{<405>}Nehemiah 5:15, *But so did not I, because of the fear of God.* “*And whatsoever you do, do it heartily* (v. 23), with diligence, not idly and slothfully:” or, “*Do it cheerfully, not discontented at the providence of God which put you in that relation.*” — *As to the Lord, and not as to men.* It sanctifies a servant's work when it is done as unto God — with an eye to his glory and in obedience to his command, and not merely as unto men, or with regard to them only. Observe, We are really doing our duty to God when we are faithful in our duty to men. And, for servants' encouragement, let them know that a good and faithful servant is never the further from heaven for his being a servant: “*Knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ*, v. 24. Serving your masters according to the command of Christ, you serve Christ, and he will be your paymaster: you will have a glorious reward at last. Though you are now servants, you will receive the inheritance of sons. But, on the other hand, *He who does wrong will receive for the wrong which he has done,*” v. 25. There is a righteous God, who, if servants wrong their masters, will reckon with them for it, though they may conceal it from their master's notice. And he will be sure to punish the unjust as well as reward the faithful servant: and so if masters wrong their servants. — *And there is no respect of persons with him.* The righteous Judge of the earth will be impartial,

and carry it with an equal hand towards the master and servant; not swayed by any regard to men's outward circumstances and condition of life. The one and the other will stand upon a level at his tribunal.

It is probable that the apostle has a particular respect, in all these instances of duty, to the case mentioned 1 Corinthians 7 of relations of a different religion, as a Christian and heathen, a Jewish convert and an uncircumcised Gentile, where there was room to doubt whether they were bound to fulfil the proper duties of their several relations to such persons. And, if it hold in such cases, it is much stronger upon Christians one towards another, and where both are of the same religion. And how happy would the gospel religion make the world, if it every where prevailed; and how much would it influence every state of things and every relation of life!