

## **The Christian Life in Biblical Perspective: The Christian Life for Dummies**

**Colossians 3:1-17**

**By Mr. Bruce Stallings**

*August 3, 2014 – Evening Sermon*

Hi, I'm Bruce and I need help in the Christian life, thank you. That's a messed up person. There are obviously not enough people here who have been in support groups in life and who have tried to help other people. When the new member joins the group they say "Hi, I'm Bruce and I need help in the Christian life" and then you say "Hi Bruce" and that means you don't have to say your name but you're a mess too and you need help in the Christian life. We are going to approach this study kind of like a support group.

I did a very offending title for our time together in the Word. I chose the title "The Christian Life For Dummies" and you came. So in a sense you're self-declared already. I'm going to give you an out. If you don't need help in the Christian life and you feel like you should do the Q & A when we get done then would you please stop reading this, because the rest of us think the Christian life is a struggle, it's hard and difficult. We would like to be a whole lot more successful in it than we actually are and that bothers us. We are trying to figure out how we get better at the Christian life.

So many times I feel like the church, and I'm not pinpointing a particular church, but all the teaching of the church if we're not careful is like teaching that kid who is in the first year of kid-pitch baseball. For the first time one of his peers is going to stand on the mound and one will be standing in the batter's box, and that kid will throw that ball at the one in the batter's box. You might think he will throw it at the catcher but at that age it looks like he is throwing the ball at you. Dads, moms, grandparents and all who are there are giving him tons of advice on how to throw and bat and they are just twisted in a knot like a pretzel. I love that last advice we give the kid which is "Relax and have fun." They are scared to death and then it's 'relax and have fun.'

We do that sometimes with the Christian life. We give all this different teaching and advice and then at the end we say 'relax and enjoy the presence of the Lord.' You are like all twisted up and don't know how to respond to that. The Christian life can be challenging because life is hard. There are unique challenges that get thrown at us in our life. Then we fall into the trap thinking 'this

is complicated.' No it's not. It's hard but it's not complicated. Satan wants to convince us that it is complicated. Satan wants us to think that there is not a "Christian Life for Dummies" book out there that can dumb it down enough for you to understand it. Satan wants you to always think that this is beyond your ability even when you have the Holy Spirit. If he can get you in his trap and keep you in that particular position then he can have a hay day with you in life.

When I go to the bookstore I love to look at the new books for dummies that come out. There are like 400 titles of books for dummies and that amazes me that people would actually buy that. If I saw any one of you in that book store I'm not going to pick up one of those books for dummies and buy it. I'll take it around the corner and read it and see if it has anything good for me. Then I'll wait till you leave, buy the book and put some sort of cover on it so it looks like another kind of book.

How do we simplify this particular issue? I believe what God has done has tried to communicate the Christian life to us in terms that we can understand. We are the ones that complicate it. We try to make it harder than it could possibly be but God has tried to simplify it. He does this several places throughout Scripture and I'm going to use Colossians 3 in this study to try to pull out this Christian life for dummies. What can we learn in terms of how we walk with the Lord? One of the things I so appreciate about Pastor Reeder is that he constantly takes a book and he makes sure that we understand it in context. I can't give you the deep, rich historical context of all that is going on in Colossians 3 but I can setup for you what has been said in this letter.

Paul is writing to a group of people that have become believers and the overwhelming majority of which he has never met. He has not directly ministered to them but he had ministered to people that have went and ministered to them, so most of the believers he is writing to have come to Christ through someone else. Paul says "I'm thrilled that you're a believer." In Colossians 1:9-10 Paul says [9] And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

This prayer he prayed for them would be a tremendous goal for us. Wouldn't it be great if God would fill us with the knowledge of His Will? Don't you pray that all the time? God, fill me with an understanding of Your Will. What is Your Will in my life? He would fill us with spiritual wisdom from the Proverbs, from the Scriptures itself. Fill us with spiritual wisdom and understanding. This would be great but God has an end, so that we might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, please Him and bear fruit for Him in our lives and increase in our knowledge of God.

The answer to that is to be like Christ. So after that Paul begins to explain to them who Christ is and the preeminence of Christ so that they can understand who Christ is. Paul recognizes his own calling in life to proclaim Christ, to warn, to teach, to encourage people with all wisdom that Paul and the ministers with him would present everyone mature in Christ. So he is writing to them about being mature in Christ and this is how you can grow in maturity in the Lord. Then Paul reminds them of their salvation and gives them a warning. He reminds them that they were dead in their trespasses, God made them alive in Christ, they died with Christ, they were raised with Christ to a new life and not just an old life that is made better and then he gives them a warning. The warning he gives them is about false teachers and false efforts of sanctification.

In other words, we want you to be mature Christians and that's called sanctification, from where you are now to maturity in Christ. We want you to be mature Christians but there are a lot of bad theories and teaching out there about how you grow in maturity as a Christian. Then Paul lists out a couple of these false teachings. He tells them to be careful of *asceticism* and literally this word means to exercise. It would be people who would put away or choose not to enjoy certain pleasures of life so as to gain favor with God or grow closer to Him. In other words, they say they won't do certain things that are not necessarily sin, like they might not watch anymore college football or drink anymore wine so that they become a mature Christian. Obviously this is a legalistic trap that would be put before the people.

Paul says this effort to appear more mature, at least in action, the worship of angels and visions to be careful of these things. What would that look like today? You could try to use the term *asceticism* in a conversation tomorrow but I don't think it's going to fly but if Paul were warning us today about this, what would that look like? In my opinion, he would tell us to be careful of sanctification from the outside in, behavior modification. In other words, be careful of the trap of thinking that maturity in Christ is behavior modification where you change the behavior and ultimately it will change the heart.

Be careful of pursuing spiritual experiences around God which is dealing with his warning on the worship of angels, not a spiritual experience with God but around Him. They were worshipping the angels and we would probably be partaking in emotionally man-made worship which would be comparable to that. In other words, designing worship to just move people for the sake of emotion. There is emotion in worship but just moving people can be done by playing the right song to move them to a particular emotion and Paul wants us to be careful of that where there is an overemphasis or unbiblical emphasis on the Holy Spirit and trying to base your maturity in Christ on the degree or depth of your spiritual experience and literally prioritizing experience over truth. It's where the mountaintop experience is more important even when it compromises truth and that would result, in my opinion, as a distortion of grace and create confusion about what grace really is and possibly create an allowance for sin in your life.

He says to be careful in dealing with visions – the mystical approach to a relationship with God. God is beyond us and a walk with God is supernatural but He has not called us to the supernatural in order to define our relationship with God. He will provide unique experiences. You'll pray and He'll answer that prayer. We'll pray for healing and we'll see somebody healed. He'll give us the words to say in the midst of an evangelistic conversation and we'll just be amazed at His work in our life but we don't base our relationship with Him upon experience but upon who He is and the way He relates to us. So Paul warns them about these different approaches and I've characterized them in terms of how we would see them now.

Then in Colossians 2:23 Paul says [23] *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.* In other words, when you look at someone doing this or you do this, it creates an appearance or wisdom, commitment and spiritual maturity but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. If you'll stop and think for a minute you'll prove that to be true in your life. Perhaps there was a sin in your life that you wanted to rid yourself of and so you did behavior modification where you tried to stop it from the outside in and never really dealing with the heart or you went on a retreat or revival and you had a spiritual experience and you thought you were now done with that particular sin, only to find out that it was still there. Depending on how disciplined you are, perhaps in a week, a day, a month, a year or whatever it may be, here it comes back again. That external approach to that has an appearance of wisdom but in a sense has no ability to stop the indulgence of the flesh. So what do you do? That is where we get to Colossians 3. Colossians 3:1–17 says

[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. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3] For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. [6] On account of these the wrath of God is coming. [7] In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. [8] But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. [9] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. [11] Heretofore is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. [12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [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. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [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.

This is the Christian life for dummies. This is very simple, very direct, not hard to understand but maybe challenging to apply, directives he gives to us that if we'll apply them to our lives this is the proper path, His life, of sanctification in our life, growing to maturity in Christ. So hopefully in this study we can put simplicity into sanctification. We can get a simple plan for what God is calling us to do so that we don't live in that pattern of confusion.

The first thing Paul tells us is to seek the things that are above and not the things of this earth. To what degree is Paul telling us to seek them? He doesn't mean to consider the things that are above – consider heaven, consider Jesus, consider God. What are the things in heaven? There is holiness, righteousness, and praise to God without end. Paul tells us to seek those things. It is far more than a consideration or to just think about it. It says to seek diligently. Think of something you sought after so much that you'd really be embarrassed to tell the rest of us the degree that you went to, to get this.

A friend of mine went to great lengths to get a job by finding out about the guy who did the hiring. He found out that this guy played tennis and it took him three different times to make this casually happen where all he wanted to do when he finished playing tennis was to give this guy his towel, just so he would come across as a nice, compassionate guy. He knew he would be in an interview with this guy in about three weeks and finally he was able to give him his towel. When he got to the interview he said "Did I now meet you at the tennis court?" and the guy hiring said "I don't think so." That was the end of it. If I told you all I did to seek after my wife, Sonya I'd be embarrassed to tell you. As a matter of fact, I would look foolish until I married her and then I would look like a genius. That was my plan all along.

Then I think about what Christ does and what Jesus teaches us through Paul. Seek after the things above. I'm not sure my seeking of the things I really want equates to as seeking after the things that are above. Paul goes on to explain what seeking after these things entail. He said for one it entails setting your mind on them. When I wake up in the morning my mind is somewhat of a blank sheet of paper and then I set my mind on something that this is my goal of what I have to get done today. Paul is saying to set your mind on the things above and not on the things of this earth. This is a fundamental problem for us.

This is an incredible challenge for us because we tend to seek the things of this world. We even ask God to give them to us. We are really messed up. So in essence we're seeking them more than we're seeking the things that are above. If you were God you would not give that to you. So He calls us to seek Him and the things that are above. Most Christians that I know would never articulate this but their theory would be I want the best that this world has to offer without compromising heaven. In other words, I want my cake and eat it too. I don't want to compromise my relationship with God but I just want this best this world would give to me but I don't want it so much that I would mess up with God. We want to put a foot in this world and a foot on God.

It reminds me of a guy who came and told me he needed help, he needed wisdom. He was dating two girls at the same time and he wanted me to help him figure out how to choose one over the other. I said "You're an idiot. This won't work. You've messed up." He said "I think it will because both now are kind of fighting for my attention." I said "Do they know you're doing this?" He said "I think they might." I said "If you call one of them right now and asks her out and she says 'yes' then she doesn't know." I will tell you that it ended poorly. We think we can date God and date the world at the same time and that somehow that will work out and that somehow those two things will go together. No, it won't for both are jealous for us. The world desperately wants us but it wants us so that it will consume us and God wants us so that we'll praise Him.

So setting our minds on the things above requires intentionality. It requires that you know what the things that are above are and how they exist. It requires action. You have to get into God's Word. You need to read about the things that are above. You need to read about the character of God, Christ and what is going on in heaven. What is it that God has called me to set my mind on?

When I was preparing for this a phrase kept going through my mind and it was one line of a song from a hymn. It was 'the things of earth will grow strangely dim.' That is perfect right here. I need the things of earth to grow strangely dim. So what makes the things of earth to grow strangely dim? The answer is at the beginning of that song. It is turn your eyes upon Jesus. Think on the things above and the things of earth grow strangely dim. The answer to not being consumed about the things of this earth is to think on the things above and when you set your mind on the things above then the things of earth do grow strangely dim. Your appetite for those things will diminish. So the first thing Paul says is to seek the things that are above.

You might need to stop here and say 'that's not what I'm seeking.' Be honest with yourself for God already knows where you are. I really don't seek the things that are above. I'm for the things that are above. I'll endorse the things that are above. I'll say 'amen' when someone else mentions the things that are above but I don't seek after the things that are above. If you don't seek after the things

above and seek after the things of this world then your Christian life is going to be thwarted. Your path and growth to maturity is going to be stunted.

The second thing Paul tells us is to put to death what is earthly in you. We think we reserve the right to interpret different phrases in Scripture kind of into our culture and setting. Most Christians, and I'm including myself, don't say 'put to death.' We say set aside, just move over a little bit. Move over, set aside the things of the earth. We might need to fall into them later. Paul says to put these earthly things to death and he doesn't give a comprehensive list but a list of things that these believers would be dealing with and it's a pretty good list. He says put to death sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness which is idolatry, anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk. You put these things to death, not wound them, trip them up or give them a good talking to hoping that they won't bother you anymore.

Not that I ever watch scary movies, however we tend to be like those in the scary movies where the girl hits him in the head with a lamp and he falls down. She thinks he is dead but he has a machete in his hand. She thinks she has destroyed the bad guy and she stands right next to him and as she starts to walk away he wakes up and grabs her leg. Why? It was because she didn't put him to death. If I wrote those movies I'd write it where his head would be cut off. Take his heart outside of his body and get confirmation that, that bad guy is done. That means that all my movies would be short stories because it would be over at that point. You wouldn't pay a dime to come see the next one.

That's what God is trying to tell us. Don't just wound it, tie it up or get rid of it but put it to death. Most of our struggle with putting things to death might even be subconscious. We don't like the consequences of the sin. Unfortunately we might have embraced or enjoyed the process or action of the sin or don't like the consequences of the sin so we don't want to destroy it but we just want to lock it up in a closet until we're more mature later when we can handle dabbling in the sin without experiencing the great consequences. That is a formula for failure before the Lord which is why He tells us to put these things to death. He gives us a hint by saying put to death what is earthly in you. It's not just the external behavior that you're trying to stop. You're trying to figure out what your motivation is for your impatience. Why do you lash out in anger against your spouse or with your kids? What's inside of you that is causing you to respond in such an angry way? What thought exists right before you slander someone? You can try to deal with that external behavior but God says to put to death what is inside of you, that discontentment that is in your life.

One of my suggestions if you can't find a place to start in this list is, is start with covetousness. Starting with coveting things of this world that God has not given to you because the covetousness of our heart is what draws us into so much sin. What is it that you need to put to death today? I encourage you that before you go to sleep tonight to think of one thing in your life and go far beyond just

confessing that one thing. Then say "God, help me to know how to put that thing to death so that it is no longer that sin that I always have to live with, that sin that I repeatedly confess to you but God help me put that to death." Perhaps as you identify what that is you're not sure how to put it to death and you may have to get help from someone to be accountable to for that so that you can figure out how to put to death what is causing you to sin in this particular area.

Thirdly, Paul says to put on a list that includes, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love and as you read that list you're reminded of the fruit of the Spirit or the evidence of the Spirit in our lives. How do you go about putting these things on? Paul says to let the peace of Christ *rule* in your hearts, not let the peace of Christ exist in your life but rule in your hearts. In other words, the peace of Christ wins. The peace of Christ is in control. The peace of Christ is not this emotion that God has and takes it and puts it inside of you. The peace of Christ is the presence of Christ. When you go through difficult situations it's not just that God pours down His peace on you, it's that He is with you. The peace of Christ is His presence with us.

God's presence with the nation of Israel gave them peace. Christ's presence with us gives us peace. Christ said "If I don't go away the Comforter won't come." So Christ gives us the Holy Spirit in our life and He says to us 'let the presence of Christ in your life rule in your life' and that's Lordship. You put on these things by submitting to the Holy Spirit, to God in your life. That's how we put on the character traits that God wants us to have. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. As good Christians we would say the Word of God dwells in us richly especially if we go to church a lot. If it is then here is what will show up: *[16]... teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

In other words, let the Word of Christ richly dwell in you richly and when it does it comes out in your life and your relationships to one another. You encourage and teach one another with the Word. Your response to whatever is taking place in life is a reminder of God's promise, a reminder of the perspective God has given to us and that produces thankfulness in our hearts. Why? It is because the Word of God is dwelling in us richly, it's overflowing, it's the primary source of information in our life and that clearly takes intentional action on your part. We need to get into the Word of God. God just doesn't make the Word dwell in me.

One of the key words that God says to us about the Holy Spirit is that He reminds you of all truth. I can't remind you of something that you don't already know. My family tries to do that to me all the time. The Holy Spirit reminds us of all truth and that means to get into Scripture. Pour yourself into Scripture. Immerse yourself in Scripture so that the Holy Spirit can bring back to your mind the daily Bible reading, the Bible Study, the sermon from Sunday, the small group study or whatever it maybe. So what do you need to put on? Figure out one thing you



need to put to death. Figure out one thing you need to put on. What is God trying to get your attention on or in? Focus on that. Go read Scripture about it. Memorize Scripture about it and let it play out.

Then Paul concludes by telling us to do everything in the name of the Lord. I spent an hour thinking about this. Do everything in the name of the Lord and then Jay Shaw gave me the answer of what I want to communicate to you. We were one of the host homes for the Impact Weekend and so they sent us this packet of information. In this packet there were rules for the students and the counselors who were coming with the students to stay in our house. I don't remember how many different rules there were but the last rule was the best one. It said if in doubt don't do it. That's a great rule. I wish I knew that rule when I started raising my children. If in doubt, don't do it.

Here is what I think Paul is saying. Whatever it is, if you can't do it in the name of the Lord then don't do it. If you can't go to that internet site in the name of the Lord, then don't do it. If you can't go to work in the name of the Lord and say "Let me tell you about Bob for he is a dirty scoundrel, in the name of the Lord, praise Jesus." You can't do that. If you can't do it in the name of the Lord then don't do it. Do everything in the name of the Lord. Let that be the filter we use for our determination of our actions and I declare that what I'm about to do I'm going to do in the name of the Lord. Let that conversation be in the name of the Lord. Can that response be in the name of the Lord? Can I show up from a long day at work and respond to my family and at the end say 'in the name of the Lord'? Does that fit? If it doesn't then don't do it.

I think this is the spiritual life for dummies. Seek the things that are above and not the things on this earth. Are you doing that? Put to death what does not belong in your life for that's the things of this earth, don't just wound them but put them to death. Put on what is of God, what is in the character of Jesus, the Holy Spirit. Focus on that and put that on. Then as a general rule if you can't do it in the name of the Lord then don't do it. Pray silently right now to ask the Lord to reveal to you what it is that you are seeking so that you can ask Him to help you seek Him. What is it that you need to put to death? Just think of one thing. Think of one thing you need to put on. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Most gracious heavenly Father, thank You that You put before us the desire to be holy as You are holy, to be mature in Christ. Would You give us Your Spirit for You know that we're incapable of doing that? Lord, would You allow us to know what it is that we seek after in our life? Lord, if we were not seeking after the things that are above would You recalibrate us this day? Would You give us a desire and a passion to intentionally seek after the things that glorify and honor You, and learning more about You in Your Word and seek it diligently? Lord, as You bring to our mind the things in our life that don't belong, the things of this

earth, help us to put them to death. Lord, may we go farther than we've gone before in dealing with our sins and the root issue of our sin and those things of the earth that are inside of us. Reveal those things to us. We want to know so we can put it to death before You by the power of Your Spirit. Then Lord, use Your Word and Your presence in our life through the Spirit that we might put on that which honors and glorifies You. Lord, may Your presence dwell in us. May Your Word dwell in us richly. I pray Lord You would give us submission to Your Holy Spirit that we might embrace the sanctification work that You are doing and then Lord, may we do all in Your Name. May we be reminded of that and ask that Your Spirit would keep that on the forefront of our mind. Would this honor You? Can we do this in the name of Jesus? Lord, when we fail tomorrow, and we will forgive us, redirect us, teach us, train us and fix our eyes back upon You that the things of this earth would grow strangely dim and that we would honor and glorify You in all things, for we pray that in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).