

Spirituality's secret: Self-slaying, self-surrender

These profound truths have the keenest edge, and are as a sacrificial knife, to slay the life of self. Creed is meant to tell on conduct. Character is the last outcome and test of doctrine ... We have here put very plainly the paradox of continual self-slaying as the all-embracing duty of a Christian. [MacLaren 256]

Study 6a: NEW LIFE in CHRIST'S IMAGE (3:5-11)

3:5-7 What is the metaphor that dominates this section? According to the comparison, can a truly 'born again' believer live for self? (2:20; 3:3; Rom.6:1-11; 2 Cor.5:14,15)

4 distinctive catchwords of early Christian catechesis are found at the head of their respective paragraphs: "put to death" (3:5-11; cf. also "put off," v.8); "put on" (3:12-17); "be subject" (3:18-4:1) and "watch and pray" (4:2-6). [O'Brien 174]

[3:5] Paul's anthropology regards men as wrong and having to get right. A great deal of the moral teaching which is outside of Christianity, and which does not sufficiently recognise that the first thing to be done is to cure and alter, but talks as if men were, on the whole rather inclined to be good, is for that very reason perfectly useless. Its fine precepts and lofty sentiments go clean over people's heads, and are ludicrously inappropriate to the facts of the case. The serpent has twined itself round my limbs, and unless you can give me a knife, sharp and strong enough to cut its loathsome coils asunder, it is cruel to bid me walk. [MacLaren 257]

[3:5] Covetousness is idolatry because it involves the setting of our affections on earthly things and not on things above, and therefore the putting of some other object of desire in the central place which Christ should occupy in our hearts. So, in Phil. 3:19f., the contrast is pointed between those who "mind earthly things" and those whose "citizenship is in heaven." [Bruce 270]

"Put to death ...
put off ... put on
... be subject ...
watch and pray"

3:8,9 When Paul talks of the 'natural man', what seems to dominate his thoughts? (Matt.12:33-37; 15:18-20)

[3:8] They are to "put off" – not merely to modify or reduce, but to put quite off from them – all sinning of the temper, all sinning of the tongue. [Moule 212]

[3:8] Christian people do not sufficiently bring the greatest forces of their religion and of God's Spirit to bear upon the homely task of curing small hastinesses of temper, and sometimes seem to think it a sufficient excuse to say, "I have naturally a hot disposition." But Christianity was sent to subdue and change natural dispositions. An angry man cannot have communion with God ... Such anger disturbs our insight into everything; eyes suffused with it cannot see; and it weakens all good in the soul, and degrades it before its own conscience. [MacLaren 260]

3:10 Note the metaphor has changed (vv.1,3,8,9). In the renewing process, what is God's agent? (Rom.12:2)

[3:10] This means that the new man grows stronger and stronger every day in a continuous, ever advancing process. It is "unto perfect knowledge," a knowledge not alone of the intellect but of the heart; a knowledge which includes faith and experience as well; moral and spiritual knowledge, which is power. Every item of true knowledge gained is growth and the conquest of evil. Meanwhile, in thus being renewed "unto perfect knowledge" the new man is being conformed more and more to the image of Him that created him; not merely that image of God in which Adam was made and which he partly lost, but something higher, richer and more glorious than that, even the image of Him who created the *new* man. [Nicholson 229,230]

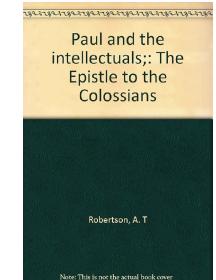
[3:10a] The moral change comes second, the first union with Jesus Christ by faith must come first. To try to begin with the second stage is like trying to begin to build a house at the second story. [MacLaren 262]

[3:10b] There is but one way to press into the depths of the knowledge of God -- namely growth into His likeness. We understand one another best by sympathy. We know God only on condition of resemblance. [MacLaren 263]

3:11 Let us mark the implications for those who create barriers between believers! Can we really attain the 'image of Christ' if we resist the truth that 'Christ is all, and in all'? (1 Cor.12; 6,25)

[3:11] The Jew divided all the world into Jews and Greeks and divided the Romans like the Greeks into Greeks and barbarians, the privileged and the unprivileged classes. Greek in contrast with Jew means merely Gentile. From the standpoint of the Greeks, the Romans were barbarians, and only gradually did they remove that stigma by power and culture. [Robertson 105]

[3:11] 'Not till that word *barbarian*' writes Prof. Max Muller ... 'was struck out of the dictionary of mankind and replaced by *brother*, not till the right of all nations of the world to be classed as members of one genus or kind was recognised, can we look even for the first beginnings of our science. This change was effected by Christianity ... *Humanity* is a word which you look for in vain in Plato or Aristotle; the idea of mankind as one family, as the children of one God, is an idea of Christian growth; and the science of mankind, and of the languages of mankind, is a science which, without Christianity, would never have sprung to life. When people had been taught to look upon all men as brethren, then and then only, did the variety of human speech present itself as a problem that called for a solution in the eyes of thoughtful observers; and I therefore date the real beginning of the science of languages from the first day of Pentecost. [Lightfoot 218]



'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'

... both feeling and conduct must be built on a foundation of truth believed and pondered. In the ordered monarchy of human nature, reason is meant to govern, but she is also meant to submit and for her the law holds good, she must learn to obey that she may be able to rule. She must bow to the word of Christ ... That word is to dwell in Christian men richly. It is their own fault if they possess it, as so many do, in scant measure. It might be a full tide ... The word should manifest the rich abundance of its dwelling in men by opening out in their minds into "every kind of wisdom." Where the gospel in its power dwells in a man's spirit, and is intelligently meditated on and studied, it will effloresce into principles of thought and action applicable to all subjects, and touching the whole round horizon of human life. [MacLaren 270]

A slave in the ancient world was, legally speaking, not a person but a piece of property, "a living tool" according to Aristotle ... [O'Brien 193]

... If then thanksgiving is God's undoubted due from all men for His gifts of creation and providence, how much more is it His due from those who have received the surpassing gift of His grace? [Bruce 282]

Study 6b: PUTTING ON CHRIST'S ROBES (3:12-17)

3:12,13 What is Paul's first thought when he considers the character of 'the elect of God, holy and beloved'?

[3:13] Harshness in dealing with failing brethren, on the basis of the necessity of maintaining righteousness, is anything but the spirit of Christ. Yearning love that would lead us to go to any possible length without contravening God's righteous claims, should ever characterize us in our dealings one with another. [Ironside 144]

3:14,15 If churches today lack love and peace, can we lay any blame with the Lord? (John 13:35; 17:20,21; Rom.5:5)

[3:14] It is interesting that there are three passages which speak of the girdle: the girdle of truth, (Eph 6:14); the girdle of peace (Eph. 4:3); and here the girdle of love. Love is regarded as that which holds together various Christian graces already mentioned. [Thomas 100]

[3:15] We may recall the other application of the same figure which occurs in the parallel Epistle to the Ephesians, where Paul sketches for us in a few rapid touches the armed Christian soldier. The two pictures may profitably be set side by side. Here he dresses the Christian soul in the robes of peace, bidding him put on pity and meekness, and above all, the silken girdle of love ... [Maclaren 267, 268]

3:16,17 When it comes to 'dressing up' as Christ, what is the secret of 'super-spirituality'? (Eph.5:25,26; Phil.2:15,16)

[3:16] For the Colossians, that "word of Christ" would be largely given in the Old Testament Scriptures, full all through of "the things concerning Him." Then, it would be given also through the oral teaching of their inspired Missionaries, which for us exists now *only* in the form of the New Testament Scriptures. [Moule 223]

[3:16] It is plain, at any rate, that when early Christians came together for worship, they not only realized the presence of Christ in the breaking of the bread but also addressed their prayers and praises to Him in a manner which tacitly, and at times expressly, acknowledged Him as no less than God. If here Paul encourages the Colossians to "sing with grace in their hearts to God," he speaks in the parallel Ephesians passage of "singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord" (presumably meaning Christ). [Bruce 285]

To Whom
were early
Christians
singing in
worship?

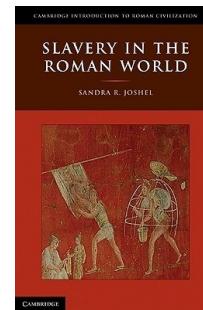
[3:16b] It was to be a daily, life-long service of song, but always as teaching and admonishing. Instruction and warning as thus conveyed would be uttered in strong and pleasant feelings, and also with the force which the charm of sweet songs might impart. [Nicholson 244]

Note again the place of thanksgiving in this perfect picture of the church (vv.15,16,17)

[3:15] One of the counts in Paul's indictment of the pagan world in the first chapter of Romans is that "knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks"

Why didn't Christianity destroy slavery? Is violent revolution the BEST method to end social evils?

[3:11] There is no privileged class in Christ's Church, as these false teachers in Colossae had taught ... "Bondman, freeman" is again an antithesis. That gulf between master and slave was indeed wide and deep; too wide for compassion to cross, though not for hatred to stride over. The untold miseries of slavery in the old world are but dimly known; but it and war and degradation of women made an infernal trio which crushed more than half the race into a hell of horrors ... Christianity waged no direct war against these social evils of antiquity, but it killed them much more effectually by breathing into the conscience of the world truths which made their continuance impossible. It girdled the tree, and left it to die -- a much better and more thorough plan than dragging it out of the ground by main force. Revolution cures nothing. The only way to get rid of evils engrained in the constitution of society is to elevate and change the tone of thought and feeling, and then they die of atrophy. Change the climate, and you change the vegetation. Until you do, neither mowing nor uprooting will get rid of the foul growths. [Maclaren 263, 264]



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