



COLOSSIANS

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...and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, Colossians 3:10

Paul just stated that the believer has “put off the old man with his deeds.” Now in contrast to that, he says that we “have put on the new *man*.” Jesus uses the same Greek words when speaking of the new wine being put into old wineskins, and the new piece of cloth being sewn onto an old garment. The word for old is a chronological word indicating something ancient. The word for new likewise suggests “new in time.” It is something that is now revealed which didn't appear before. In other words, we have had a complete break from what we were.

Such a person then “is renewed.” The word is actually in the present tense and is more accurately translated as “is being renewed.” This word, rather than being “new in time,” gives the sense of “new in quality.” We have been made new, and therefore we are to be renewed, improving from moment to moment. The state of this renewal is to be “in knowledge.” There is an object which we are to focus on, and we are to grow in quality towards the knowledge of that object.

Paul then tells us what that object is by saying this should take place “according to the image of Him who created” us. We are to strive to be improved, from one stage to the next, until we bear the image of Christ. As our knowledge of Christ is, at this time, to be found solely in the Scriptures, then it means that we are to study that marvelous body of writings in order to become more like Him.

It would make no sense to put off the old man, as he said we have done in the last verse, and then to remain ignorant of what our transformation into the new man means. If that were the case, we would actually remain in the state of whatever knowledge we possess. Without gaining knowledge of Christ Jesus we would, by default, be new men possessing only an old knowledge. Unfortunately, this is the state of a large portion of saved believers. They receive Christ and they stagnate. They remain carnal in their thinking despite having been regenerated in their spiritual selves.

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

Peter gives instructions in how to avoid this pitfall in 2 Peter 1:2-9. Try reading those verses today and reflect on how you too can avoid falling into the pit of forgetfulness, even to the point that you forget you have been saved in the first place.

Life application: Each of us is individually responsible for his own walk in the Lord. Are we going to move forward, seeking to know Him more and more each day? Or, are we going to stagnate and face life's trials with all of the uncertainties that the unregenerate world faces? Let us endeavor to live for the Lord now, grow in Him daily, and be pleasing to Him when we stand before Him at the judgment seat of Christ.

...where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all. Colossians 3:11

Paul, still showing remarkable consistency with his other letters, now gives a verse reminiscent of Galatians 3:28 -

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Like in Galatia, he here explains the universality of the Gospel message. He begins with, “there is neither Greek nor Jew.” The words are in opposite order to those written to Galatia. In Galatia, there was an insipid infection of believing that the Judaizers were more spiritual than those in Galatia. The Judaizers forced their adherence to the Old Testament on the Gentile believers, and those Gentiles swallowed it up. This was less problematic in Colossae, and so he says “Greek nor Jew.” The Gentiles were on the same level as the Jews.

As distinctions go, this is where the greatest of all lay in the mind of the Jews. They were on one side; the Gentiles were on the other. The term “Greek” here is being applied to any non-Jew. Because of the conquests of Alexander, the Greek culture, influence, and language had permeated the known world. Within that sphere, the Jews remained Jews though. In order to then show that this distinction was now void, he begins his list with this. To the Colossians, it was an admonishment that they were not to look to the Jews for their doctrine, but to God. They were not to insert the false teachings of the Judaizers, but to submerge themselves in the truth of the gospel.

He then further defines this category by saying, “circumcised nor uncircumcised.” The addition is not unnecessary. One could say, “Being a Jew may not be a big distinction anymore, but being circumcised is.” Paul spent a great deal of time on the issue of circumcision in Galatians, but he has not done so in this letter. Therefore, he is noting simply and directly that the rite of physical circumcision means nothing.

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His next words say “barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free.” The barbarian is an uncultured person. In comparison to others, he is uncivilized, unpolished, and looked at as contemptible. In the world at large, such a person would be considered less notable, but in Christ, all are on the same level. This also included the Scythian. This is the only time the Scythian is noted in the New Testament.

They were those people who lived on the north and northeast coast of the Black and Caspian seas. This region extended well into Asia. It included the lands of the Mongols and Turks of our more modern age. They were considered a savage people, and were uncivilized and ferocious. However, even such seeming enemies of the cultured areas of Paul’s evangelism were to be considered on the same level if they were in Christ.

Paul finishes the list with, “slave nor free.” The free people of the Roman Empire were considered on a completely different level than the slaves. This distinction was so great that Paul’s words here could hardly be imagined by either class when considering the other. But once in Christ, the distinctions were removed. The letter of Philemon gives important insights into this.

After the list, Paul then finishes with, “...but Christ *is* all in all.” The presence of Christ in a believer is all that matters. In Him, all distinctions are swept away, and all are on an equal playing field. We cannot hold grudges against race, creed, culture, ethnicity, etc. by saying that they are not deserving of Christ. All are, and all are welcome.

It is of note that Paul does not include “male nor female” here in his letter to the Colossians. This may have been considered a problem in Galatia, and so Paul addressed it to ensure that that it was understood that women were on an equal footing concerning salvation. However, in the Greek culture, this was not a problem. In fact, including them could cause the possibility of the growth of licentiousness. The attitude of men towards women might jump to an unintended extreme. Therefore, Paul simply left the matter unstated.

Understanding these things, his words of this verse actually imply that these distinctions still exist in the world in which we live. When naming categories, it shows that the categories are there to name. No one reading his words would say, “That person isn’t circumcised” if he was actually circumcised. The same is true with those who are slaves and those who are free. The differences exist, but Paul’s point is that they have no bearing on being in Christ. And yet, those who believe the church has replaced Israel ignore the categories that Paul mentions first – Greek and Jew. In doing so, replacement theologians have even made the claim that those in the church are the true Jews, even if they are Gentiles! This is both unbiblical and irrational.

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To state the names implies there is a difference. Though there is now no distinction between them “in Christ,” there is a difference between them “in the world.” The church is not comprised of only Jews.

Life application: If you are a Jew in Christ, you remain a Jew. If you are a Gentile in Christ, you remain a Gentile. There is no distinction between the two, but the differences remain. Don't call yourself what you are not!