

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL FRUIT

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PAUL GIVES 2 KEY ACTIONS IN DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL FRUIT: 1: PUTTING OFF. 2: PUTTING ON.

1: PUTTING OFF

The Christian will always be pulled in two directions, we are in essence a living Spirit in a dead body. 'If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness' (Romans 8:10). Colossians says, 'you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God' (3:3). 'Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry' (3:5).

The question is where is your mind set; on Christ or in this world? 'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth' says Paul. (1-2). Are we preoccupied with worry- Plans - Books - TV - the news? We must set our minds on things above and draw strength from God's presence.

Then, we are told to put off our old attitudes; God does not do it for us, we must 'put off all these' (3:8). This is not about will power; it is about which kingdom we draw strength from. A profound change takes place when someone comes to faith in Christ.

We change our spiritual condition. We move from death to life 'you were dead in your sins but God made you alive with Christ' (2:13).

We change our kingdom; 'He has delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves' (1:12-13).

We change our standing. We were enemies, now we are reconciled. 'Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you.' (1:21-22).

God comes to live within us. 'For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ' (2:9-10).

Because we are changed people, there are things we are to put off.

Paul separates these into two categories, sins of the heart 'sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry' (3:5). These inward sins are not seen openly but God sees, and the attitude of our heart will eventually show. Through confession and repentance, we need to put off these inward temptations.

The second category is our words. People cannot see our hearts but they can hear our words. 'You yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language..... Do not lie to one another' (3:8-9 NKJV). We probably sin in our words more than any other area. Do you suffer from foot in mouth disease? It comes from the old self not from Christ; there is no excuse for addressing a brother or sister in Christ with 'anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language or lies.' James puts it clearly 'The tongue - is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell' (James 3:6). Our words betray our hearts, better to say nothing than wound a brother or sister in Christ. We are to put these things off like old worn-out clothes.

2: WHAT ARE WE TO PUT ON?

'Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge, in the image of its Creator' (3:10). The process is not finished, when God took us on, he took on a restoration project. He is restoring the lost Image of God (Gen 1:26-27). This comes through his Spirit reigning within.

The test is how we treat each other. 'As God's chosen people, -- clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you' (3:12-13).

We need an attitude adjustment, we are to put on a new attitude like new clothes, we have to clothe ourselves, God will not do it. This attitude is the attitude of Christ, and he expects it to live in us. If we do not feel like putting on 'compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience' we must obey by faith and our feelings will soon follow on.

Feelings follow decisions. If you decide to act in a loving way, you will begin to love, if you act in a forgiving way, you will begin to forgive. Do not let your fleshly feelings dominate your spiritual life. 'Set your mind on things above' (3:2).

Grievances test character. I have met people whose grievances consume them. I remember J--n telling me, after her mother's funeral, that she suspected her mother kept her money in the brass railing above the fireplace, when she arrived at the house, her sister had already removed the railing, and said, 'It was empty.' From that day forward, there was no trust between these two sisters. It became a persistent unforgiven grievance.

'And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity' (3:14). Love is described here as a belt making the clothes fit. If our doctrine does not lead us to love, we have our doctrine wrong. For 'love will cover a multitude of sins' (1 Peter 4:8). Good doctrine leads to loving actions.

One word of caution, love is not an excuse for sin. There is a new 'inclusive' gospel being preached in our churches, which often ignores repentance and the new birth. We are not saved by God's love, we are saved by the blood of Christ. Paul calls the Colossians to love one another, but to stand firmly against any gospel that does not insist on the fruit of holiness. Repentance and faith are still the doorway to the kingdom. (Mark 1:15.) A life that turns from sin is the sign that the Spirit of Christ is at work within. The gospel invites all, but on Judgement Day, only the repentant will be included. The gospel of inclusiveness is a popular, but counterfeit gospel. It is one step from universalism, the false belief that all will finally be saved.

3: THREE GUIDING LIGHTS

In our progress to holiness God grants us three guides for the way.

i) The peace of Christ: 'Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts' (3:15). The word for rule is 'referee' or 'umpire'.

The Holy Spirit will remove our peace when we sin. The moment we lose our sense of peace, the Holy Spirit is calling us back to confession and repentance, this is a continual process. God brings to mind the thing that caused his peace to leave and until we confess it, we will not find his peace restored. When the referee blows the whistle, we have broken the rules and the game stops. When we lose our peace, we must stop and put right the offence before continuing to walk with Christ. The presence of peace or absence of peace is our guide, 'the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts' (3:15).

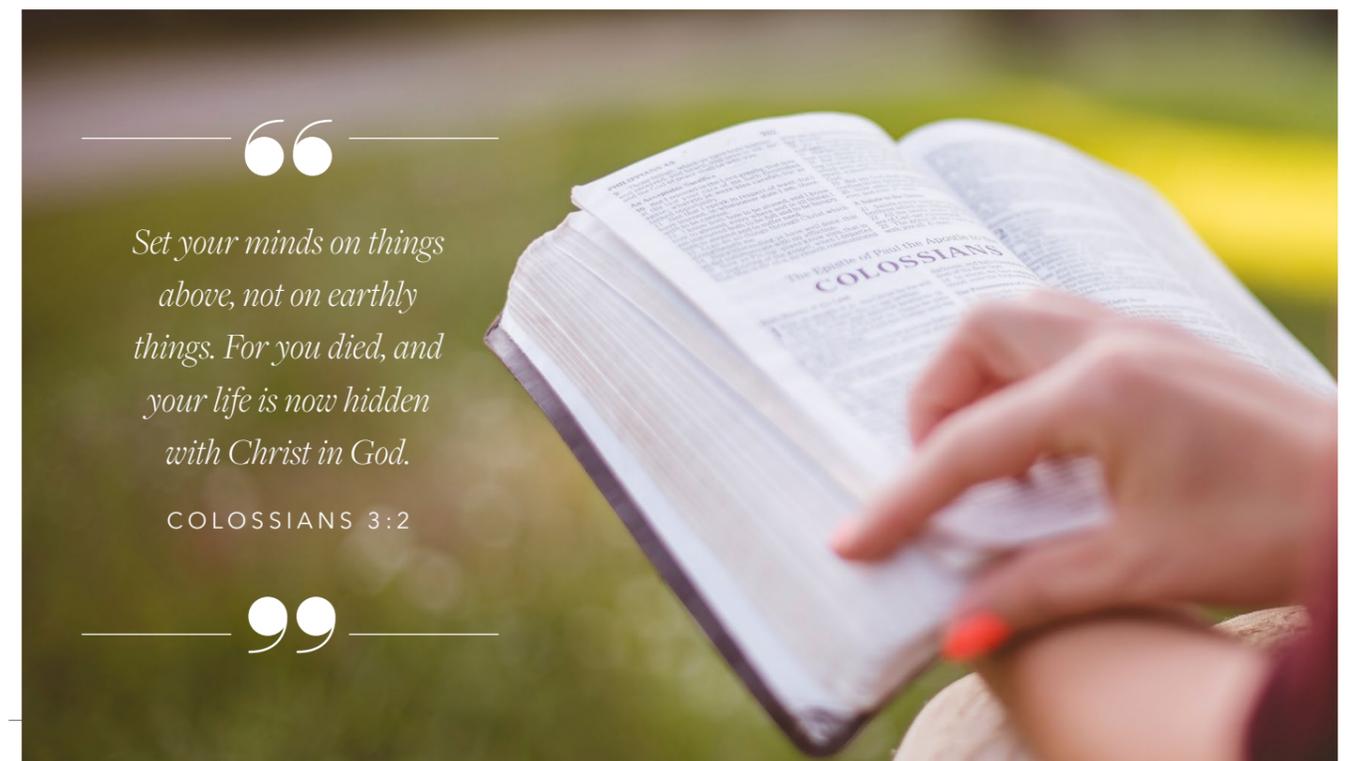
ii) The guidance of the word: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (3:16). God's word speaks into our situation; the Bible makes a distinction between the 'Logos' the eternal word and the 'Rhema', a specific or 'now' word. The preached and the prophetic word can speak directly to our situation so that the eternal word becomes the 'now' word for us. Most importantly, God will never inspire us to do something that his written Word specifically condemns. The word and the Spirit are one, in their guidance, and all guidance leads to holiness. Rationalising our sinful behaviour will not bring back the peace of God. The rule is simple in matters of morality, the Word is inspired and reason is fallible, as Doctor Martyn

Luther discovered; reason must be captive to the word of God. This is an unchanging principle of guidance.

iii) The heart fixed on praise: Praise has a strong link with thankfulness. 'Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God' (3:16). Praise focuses our spirit on God and changes our attitude. There has been a rediscovery of praise over the last 30 years. People have come to see praise and worship as a means of entry into God's presence (Psalm 100:4). Those who enter through the gates of praise find praise is more than singing, it is entering whole heartedly into the joy of the Lord through the expression of a song. This is an instruction to be obeyed, rather than a suggestion to be considered. 'Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God' (3:16).

If we are to be fruitful we must learn to put off the old self, with its attitudes and words that wound, fix our minds on Christ and put on the new self, with a changed attitude. We must listen to the guiding peace of the Holy Spirit and let the Word of Christ dwell richly in us as our hearts are thrilled with praise.

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Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

COLOSSIANS 3:2

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