

The Beauty and Glory of Christian Living

The Beauty and Glory of Christian Living

Edited by
Joel R. Beeke



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The Beauty and Glory of Christian Living

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With heartfelt appreciation for

Ann Dykema

my faithful and loyal administrative assistant
who works hard, promptly, and efficiently,
often going beyond the call of duty.

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Preface

On November 21, 1637, the Puritan divine Samuel Rutherford wrote to a dear friend, “The world knoweth not our life; it is a mystery to them.”¹ To those who, like Rutherford, know firsthand how sweet it is “to be wholly Christ’s, and wholly in Christ,”² the Christian life can be described as nothing short of being both beautiful and glorious.

This book consists of the addresses given at the 2013 Puritan Reformed Conference on the beauty and glory of Christian living. The addresses are organized under three headings: 1) Christian Living in Its Divine Roots, 2) Christian Living in Its Human Branches, and 3) Christian Living in Its Earthly Storms.

The first section considers the divine source of the Christian life. In chapter 1, Michael Barrett leads us through an exposition of Colossians 3:1–17. Here we are reminded that for the Christian, “the more we know the gospel and our completeness in Christ, the more we can enjoy and experience the gospel in life.” Ian Hamilton develops this theme further in chapters 2 and 4. He answers the question, What precisely is the Spirit’s sanctifying, beautifying ministry? and concludes that the “Spirit does not mortify sin without our cooperation. He blesses or prospers our striving, but He does not bless our sloth.” In chapter 4, Hamilton further develops this idea by addressing the means by which God beautifies His children. He points out that Jesus Christ is God’s beautifying template whereby His children are conformed to Him. In chapter 3, John Tweeddale enlarges upon the theme

1. Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. Andrew A. Bonar (London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1891), 530.

2. Rutherford, *Letters*, 13.

of spiritual-mindedness by focusing on John Owen's "two basic motivations: 'zeal for God's glory and compassion for men's souls.'"

The second section considers God's work in believers in three practical areas: the family, the workplace, and in evangelism. In chapter 5, Joel Beeke considers the Puritan William Gouge's practical views on marriage and child-rearing, showing that in some ways the Puritans are far ahead of us in their biblical understanding of family. In chapter 6, William VanDoodewaard addresses the issue of the Christian in the workplace, drawing our attention to 1 Peter 2:18–25. VanDoodewaard concludes that for the Christian, "Jesus' perfect example and His humble suffering" is the supreme motivation for believers to work for His glory. Rounding out the second section in chapter 7, Brian Najapfour presents five reasons that followers of Christ are to be evangelistic and five common excuses for not being evangelistic.

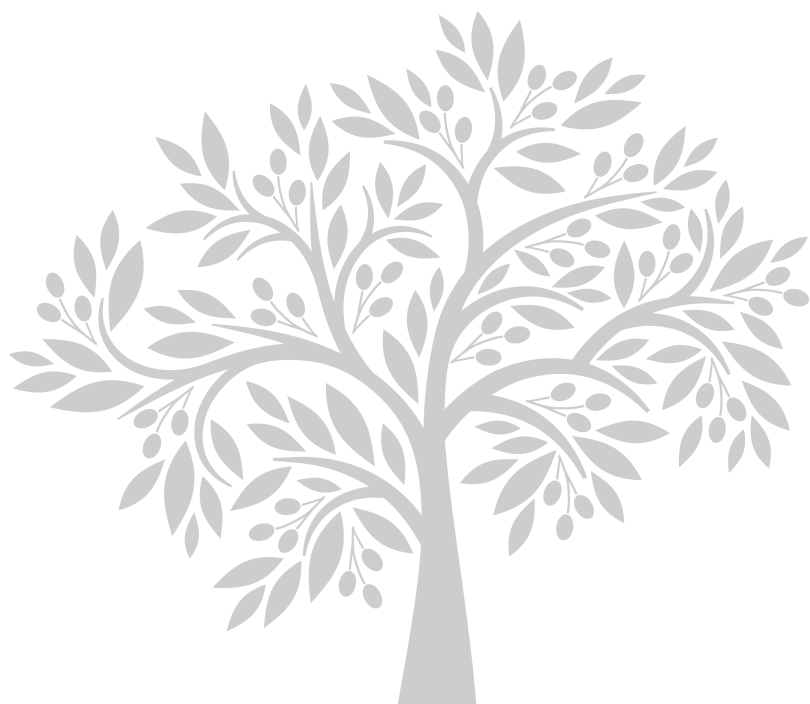
The final section challenges us to consider the beauty and glory of Christian living in the midst of life's trials and afflictions. In chapter 8, Gerald Bilkes gives us ten reasons "why we ought not to think God's fiery furnace strange." In chapter 9, Brian Croft provides husbands with three lessons to consider when exploring the biblical model for marriage: flee the adulterous woman, delight in your wife, and tremble before God. Then, in chapter 10, David Murray draws our attention to the joyful words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:8. Believers in all ages worry, Murray admits, "but Paul holds out the prospect of an unimaginable and unsurpassable divine peace to garrison our hearts and minds, a peace that patrols the entrances to our emotions and thoughts." Christians, therefore, are called to change what feeds their minds.

In chapter 11, Brian Croft draws on Mark 5 to find hope in times of sickness, suffering, and death, counseling us to "hold fast to our sovereign Savior, knowing He is our hope, our joy, and the One who rules over all circumstances of our sickness and even our death for the good of His people, for the display of the gospel, and the glory of His great name." In the final chapter, John Tweeddale provides us with a sweeping view of the book of Judges, focusing both on the devastating consequences of sin and the tenacity of divine grace.

This book, like the conference, affirms that the Christian life begins and ends in the free and sovereign grace of God in Christ.

We are grateful for all of the individuals who helped to organize the conference and the publication of this book. We are also thankful for each of the speakers who participated in the 2013 Puritan Reformed Conference and who gave us permission to publish their addresses. Most of all, we are humbly grateful to the triune God, “who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

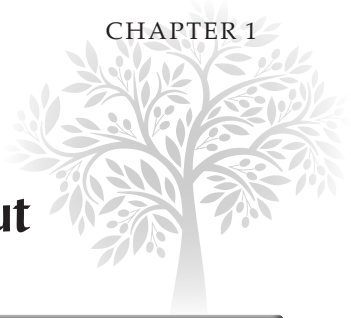
—Joel R. Beeke and Chris Hanna



**CHRISTIAN LIVING IN ITS
DIVINE ROOTS**

Living Out Our Faith: The Christian Life Inside Out

Michael Barrett



Colossians 3:1–17

Many Christians have a problem with the Christian life. Faith loses its attractiveness. Initial enthusiasm dwindles and disillusionment sets in. For some, Christianity is just a set of beliefs; for others, it is a rigid set of standards. Nearly every new movement or seminar for success is an effort to capitalize on the dissatisfaction of Christians who have somehow failed to understand what the Bible says about the Christian life. There is a practical side to doctrine, and Scripture inseparably links believing and living.

It amazes me that the truths that so overwhelmed the thinking of first-century Christians never seem to cross the minds of twenty-first-century believers. There is in the gospel a dynamic to energize and guide life along the proper paths. It is only when Christians ignore the gospel that they find Christianity a drudgery. Too often, belief in the gospel is reduced to a past decision rather than elevated and centralized into a corpus of truth that is the constant object of present faith and application. All of life, for the Christian, ought to be squarely focused on Christ. Christ, His cross, and the completeness of His gospel must interfere with life; the gospel must be the focal point for living out our faith. It must stand in the way of every sin and point the way to piety. It is always the case that right thinking about the gospel produces right living in the gospel.

Colossians 3:1–17 makes this connection. In the previous chapter, Paul exposes and warns against all the additions to Christ that are supposed to lead to spiritual attainment and satisfaction. He does so by expounding the completeness of Christ in terms of His deity and

humanity (2:9) and the believer's completeness in Him in terms of union (v. 10). Significantly, the words *fullness* and *complete* are from the same Greek root. Paul's play on words underscores the wonder of the truth itself. Our completeness is in union with Christ, not in how we adhere to religious rituals or other manifestations of "will worship" (v. 23).

In Colossians 3, Paul builds on the theology of throne-union with Christ and looks at the Christian's life from two perspectives—inside and outside. The apostle defines the principle for Christian living and then the procedure for living it. Our text is a classic example of how deep theology translates into the practice of life. I think it was Charles H. Spurgeon who said this chapter begins in heaven and ends in the kitchen. Paul's logic is clear in proving once again that we are complete in Christ.

Therefore, I want to consider the text from these two perspectives: the principle for Christian living and the procedure for Christian living—the hidden life and the seen life.

The Principle: The Hidden Life

In the opening four verses, Paul expounds the theology that is essential and foundational to both spiritual life and godly living. He draws our attention to the objective realities of the believer's union with Christ, with all of its representative, vital, intimate, and mystical significance. This union is equally true for every genuine believer in Jesus Christ, but is not equally enjoyed or consciously experienced by all. Hence, he directs us how to think in the light of the facts. Three thoughts stand out about the believer's hidden life.

The Fact of the Hidden Life

Verse 3 declares the proposition: "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." This is indisputable fact. The text more literally reads, "You died." Since he is writing to those who were very much alive physically, this past death refers to something spiritual, something, dare I say, mystical. Don't be afraid of this word, so long as you confine it within biblical limits. Theologically, it refers to spiritual truth that surpasses human comprehension because of the transcendence of its nature and significance. It is a most appropriate word to designate our union with Jesus Christ, a truth that,

notwithstanding its reality, defies explanation. The statement “You died,” then, takes us to that mysterious and mystical union of every believer with Jesus Christ in His death on the cross.

There is a sense, though incomprehensible, in which every believer jointly participates and shares in the work of the Lord Jesus. This staggers the mind. Consider these astounding statements that declare the believer’s communion with the death of Christ: “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20); “We are buried with him by baptism into death” (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12); “Our old man is crucified with him” (Rom. 6:6); and “If one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14; i.e., all for whom He died, died). Obviously, we did not hang on the cross along with Christ to suffer all the agony and torment that He endured in both body and soul. In the physical sense, Christ suffered and died alone as the substitute for His people. He bore the penalty of our sin and exempted us from ever having to pay it. He is our Federal or Representative Head, who stands in our place, and we were, thus, united to Him. When Christ died, all of His people died with Him. God regarded believers—His elect and Christ’s inheritance—as being in His Son.

It was on the cross where satisfaction for our sin was secured and where our connection to sin was severed. Being crucified with Christ means that we should look down on sin and the old life from that vantage. Sin that is so alluring when it is in our face loses its appeal when we view it from the old rugged cross.

Ironically, although we died, our life has been hidden with Christ in God. This mystical death did not produce a lifeless corpse. On the contrary, our union with His death always includes union with His resurrection and life. Consider verse 1, which assumes that believers were raised with Christ. Community with Him in His death always includes community with Him in His life.

Significantly, Paul uses a different form of verb to express the hidden life. Whereas Paul says we died once for all, the form of the verb *hid* addresses both the past act of being hidden and its continuing consequences. When we died with Christ, we were at that very time hidden in Christ, and there we constantly remain. Given that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God (v. 1), this is all the more remarkable. He’s in heaven; we’re in heaven in Him. By faith, we are to know and reckon for ourselves that we are in Him.

The implications and applications of this throne-union are far-reaching, both regarding our security with God and our duty in the world. The world can't see us there (after all, we're hidden), but God does because all things are open before His eyes. The Head-body analogy is one way Paul describes union with Christ (1:18). It is our security that God sees the body through the Head; it is our duty that the world sees the Head through the body. It is sobering to realize that the world's estimation of the Head is so often determined by what it perceives about the body. That makes a huge difference in how we live out our faith.

The Imperatives of the Hidden Life

Paul issues two imperatives in verses 1 and 2 that are the logical corollaries to his proposition regarding the believer's union with Christ. The logic is clear from the opening statement, which assumes the reality of fact: "If ye then be risen with Christ." Given the fact of life-union with Jesus Christ, there are some key things to think about. Both imperatives, "seek" (v. 1) and "set your affections" (v. 2), involve thinking. Imperatives are always addressed to the will and identify what we are obliged to do.

First, *seek those things which are above*. The form of the verb demands a continuing and habitual process. This is not to be an occasional thought, but one that becomes regular routine. Furthermore, this seeking does not refer simply to an investigation, but includes the thoroughgoing effort to obtain what is sought. The direction of this ongoing effort is above, where Christ sits exalted in His session at the Father's right hand. This apostolic advice parallels the words of Christ Himself in His Sermon on the Mount, admonishing us to lay up treasures in heaven and not on earth because "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19–21). There is no treasure more valuable than Jesus, the pearl of great price. Nothing else approaches His infinite value and intrinsic worth. To regard Him so is to have our earthly hearts fixed there where He is and where we are in union with Him.

Again, this seeking is more than just an examination of the doctrine, but a striving to experience and possess the fullness of the blessing. Too often Christians are like the ten Israelite spies who admired and could describe the grapes of Canaan but failed to

possess them; they remained on the border of blessing. Examining and expounding gospel truth is fundamental, but it is vital that we go beyond its exposition to its experience. We must live in the reality of what we believe. Let us not live on the border of spiritual blessing, but let us enter its fullness. Let us be like Caleb and Joshua, who entered into the possession of what God had promised and provided.

Second, *set your affection on things above*; literally, “be thinking about the above things.” The form of this verb also demands continuing and habitual activity. Thinking is the exercise of the mind and is spiritually crucial. Paul uses the noun form cognate to our verb in Romans 8:6 when he says, “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” One’s mind-set is a litmus test that reveals what one really is. Thinking is the first step to doing. Right thinking produces right behavior. It is imperative that the believer, therefore, habitually and routinely engage the mind on the above things, where Christ is and where the believer is with Christ in that throne-union.

I don’t know how thinking works, but I know it works. I know that when you think about something hard enough and long enough, you can’t stop thinking about it. I suppose the issue is what we think about when we’re not thinking! Habitual thinking wears grooves in the brain. Check out Philippians 4:8, where Paul lists some of the above things to think about. We need “to groove our brains” with things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy—all of which are subsumed in Christ Himself.

This obviously does not mean that we never think about other things, for other things are unavoidable parts of life. But it does mean that all we think about and all we do are governed by the fact that we are united to Christ. Thinking about that truth affects everything else. Contrary to the common adage that someone can be so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good, the gospel logic is that the more heavenly minded we become, the more earthly good we will be.

The Prospect of the Hidden Life

The prospect of the hidden life is that it will not remain hidden. A day is coming when faith will transition to sight, when the invisible will become visible, and when our subjective experience will become one with our objective position. The Greek verb translated “appear”

means to be manifest, completely revealed and open. Christ, “who is our life”—the essence of the life we possess and the object of our passions—will one day be openly revealed in all of His splendid glory. Adding to the wonder is the fact that we will be manifested in the same glory with Him. There is no separating Christ and His people, not then and not now.

The prospect of that certain glory shared with Christ puts all the stuff of time in its proper place. Occupation with Christ is the secret to everything in the Christian life. So living out our faith means that we live now with a view to then.

The Procedure: The Seen Life

What is true on the inside shows itself on the outside. Although our union with Christ is hidden from view, the evidences of that union should be seen. Doctrine breeds duty. Ethical demands flow from theological truths. Union with Christ looks like something.

In verses 5–17, the apostle details the implications of being in Christ, both in negative and positive terms. His logic was adopted by the Westminster divines in their classic definition of sanctification as “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness” (Shorter Catechism, Q. 35). We want to follow that logic as well as we consider what the hidden life is supposed to look like.

Death to Sin

In Colossians 3:5–11, the focus is on the negative component of this sanctification: death to sin. Believers are to put off the vices belonging to the old life outside of Christ. It only makes sense that if we died judicially to sin in union with Christ in His death on the cross, we should also die practically to sin as we live in union with His life in the resurrection. Here’s how Paul puts it in Romans 6:4: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Paul’s imagery here is suggestive. In physical burial, the corrupting corpse is separated from the land of the living. In a remarkable irony, in this spiritual burial with

Christ, the “living” corpse of the believer is separated from the corruption of the world.

Paul’s argument in verses 5–11 suggests three thoughts. First, he demands *the duty of death*. Paul issues commands; therefore, these are not simply apostolic or pastoral suggestions for optional behavior, but imperatives that demand obedience. We are to “mortify” our earthly “members” along with their sinful practices (v. 5). The word *members* usually designates physical limbs or body parts, but by metonymical extension it includes whatever is in us that is of this world that is bent to sin. It parallels what Paul calls the “old man,” which we will consider in a moment.

In many ways, the biggest threat to our sanctification is self. Therefore, we must die to self. But this death is not by natural causes, for dying to self is most unnatural. The word *mortify*, perhaps, has lost some of its shock in modern usage. The word means to kill, with all of its violent connotations. This is suicide. We must kill self, put it to death. The language is blunt, forceful, and a bit shocking, but no more so than Christ’s counsel to eliminate offending body parts for the spiritual welfare of the soul (Matt. 5:29–30). This member-killing refers to an urgent and immediate effort to eliminate by execution anything and everything that is at odds with God. If our life is truly in heaven, then we must kill off the sinful stuff of our earthly existence. The consequence of Christ’s dying for us and our dying in Him is that we should not live anymore with a view to ourselves—our interests, ambitions, or desires that would be contrary to grace (see 2 Cor. 5:15).

We are also “to put off” sinful practices (Col. 3:8), those things that stain and thus ruin the appearance of a garment. The imagery changes, but the topic is the same. By using an illustration about changing clothes, Paul makes clear that life in Christ cannot look the same as before. It is only logical that after a bath, you would not put on the filthy clothes that made the bath necessary to begin with. So spiritually, after the washing of regeneration, we must put off the garments that have been mucked up from the dirt of this world. Life in union with Christ requires a visible transformation. The Bible knows nothing about a gospel that makes no demands on life or requires no changes. Grace finds sinners in the most indescribable of filth, but grace never leaves sinners where it finds them.

Second, Paul identifies *the sins subject to death*. He gives two extensive but not exhaustive lists of sins to illustrate the kind of behavior that is incongruous to the hidden life in Christ (vv. 5, 8). It is not my intent to define or elaborate on each of the specific vices, but I do want us to get the principal point the apostle is making.

Each group lists five sins, all of which relate to specific violations of the second division of God's Moral Law, the section dealing with man's relationship to man. Transgression of the second division is evidence of transgression against the first. Man's relationship with his fellows is a mirror of his relationship with God. In verse 5, the sins progress from outward acts to inward attitudes, whereas in verse 8, the sins move from inward attitudes to outward acts. Putting the two groups together creates a logical *chiasmus* in which the center focus is on the inward attitudes and thoughts.

Chiasmus is a common literary structure throughout the Bible. It's a different logic than modern Westerners are accustomed to using, but recognizing it often helps us follow the progression of a biblical argument. It is like a big X that draws attention to the point where the lines intersect.

So here, at the point of intersection, are the sins of the mind. This focus affirms our proposition that thinking determines behavior. Sins in the head are no less serious than sins of the hands.

Another literary technique is also operating when all ten sins are combined. It would be a mistake to assume that these specifically designated sins are the only ones with which we must be concerned. Paul employs a device called *brachylogy*, which is a partial list of something to indicate the totality of something. Paul's point, therefore, is not just that we should deal with these sins specifically, but with sin generally. He gives a representative list to include all vices that are contrary to holiness. The list of sins to which you may be particularly susceptible may differ from mine, but the text makes it clear that we must deal directly with the sins in our lives no matter what they are.

Verse 7 gives the hope that we can indeed mortify and put off our sins. There is power in the gospel to enable the transformation required by grace. The Colossian believers used to walk and live within the sphere of those sins, but now they don't. What used to characterize their lives no longer does. That reversal of lifestyle

marks every genuine believer. No Christian is experientially as holy as he should be or as holy as he will be when he appears with Christ in glory, but neither is he as unholy as he was. Every saint can say with John Newton, "I am not what I ought to be...not what I wish to be...not what I hope to be...not what I once was...[but] 'by the grace of God I am what I am.'" (1 Cor. 15:10).¹

Third, Paul explains *the reasons for death to sin*. He gives two reasons, one negative and one positive. Negatively, death to sin is necessary because sin angers God (v. 6). Every sin is a violation of His righteous justice, and His wrath is poised against it. Whereas the sinful world stands already condemned, all those in Christ have been delivered from condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Inasmuch as Christians, then, are no longer under God's wrath, sinfulness should no longer be their practice. We are no longer subject to God's wrath because of Christ's atoning work. The cross stands as the greatest evidence of God's justice and wrath against sin. God put the cross of Christ in the place of our sins, and so must we. It was because of our sin that Christ died. To think of why He died and to remember that we died in union with Him is reason enough to die to sin.

Positively, death to sin is necessary because we have been restored to the image of God (Col. 3:9–10). Paul transitions to this argument by linking two causal participles ("put off" and "put on") to the imperative "lie not one to another," suggested by the imagery of dress. I don't think it is really true that clothes make the man, but they do reveal something about the man. I love to wear camouflage. So when I wear it along with a hat advertising Cabela's, you would be safe to assume that I hunt and that I wish I were in the woods, where neither you nor the deer could see me. On the other hand, if I were to wear the scrubs of a surgeon, that would be misleading and potentially dangerous if you believed what you saw. The point very simply is that you should dress according to what you are.

To be hidden in union with Christ demands death to sin because we have put off the old man and put on the new. John Calvin defines the "old man" as "whatever we bring from our mother's womb, and

1. Josiah Bull, *John Newton of Olney and St. Mary Woolnoth: An Autobiography and Narrative* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1870), 334.

whatever we are by nature.”² In this context, it designates the unregenerate state in which there is no spiritual life or sensitivity and no impulse toward God or spiritual things. It is that nature that gives rise and expression to every evil deed.

The simple fact of the matter is that those who trust Christ don't wear those clothes anymore. No longer are they spiritually dead, insensitive, or motionless toward God. They look different because they have put on the new man.

The “new man” refers to that regenerate nature in which the Holy Spirit has implanted the principle of spiritual life. It is the new garment worn by everyone hidden in Christ. Paul describes the new man as being continually, habitually, progressively renewed in the knowledge of the Creator's image. It is not a sinless nature, but it wants to be and is headed in that direction.

It is beyond the scope of our meditation here to think about the full meaning and many implications of the image of God. Suffice it to say that it was the unique mark of man's original creation that was tragically marred by the fall of man into sin and wonderfully restored by God's grace through the gospel. Jesus Christ is the ideal image, even the perfect manifestation of God (1:15), and it is only through Him and in Him that we are being renewed. Christ, the Second Adam, reversed the curse and restored all lost by the first Adam.

So, regardless of race or nationality (3:11), every believer looks the same in this regard: they have all put on the new man. To wear the new man is to be adorned with Christ, who is all and in all: He is our uniform. Christ is everything in the realm of grace; there certainly is no experience or enjoyment of grace without Him. We die to sin by looking to Christ. As we look, we are changed progressively from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18) until He appears, when we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). If seeing Christ with our eyes is how glorification works, it follows that seeing Christ with the eyes of faith is how sanctification works. There is something about seeing Jesus that makes us like Him.

2. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. John Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 211, on Col. 3:9.

Alive to Righteousness

Living out our faith is more than not doing bad things; it involves doing good things as well. A life of faith is not just negative; it is most positive. Again, the Westminster Shorter Catechism says it well when it affirms that in our sanctification we are enabled “to live unto righteousness.”

Paul concludes his argument about the “seen life” by expounding what it is to live spiritually (Col. 3:12–17). There are three points to his exposition. First, he delineates *the marks of spiritual life*. He continues the clothes analogy with the imperative “put on,” and then lists the virtues that are to be seen in the new man, the style of clothing he is to wear. He addresses the imperative to those chosen by God, set apart as distinct, and the objects of fixed and continuing love—other ways of identifying those whose lives have been hidden with Christ in God.

Again, it is not my intent to define each of the virtues, all of which follow the same pattern as the list of vices by relating to the second division of the law. I want simply to draw some conclusions. Significantly, all of the virtues or marks are characteristics of Christ Himself. That should not be surprising, since Christlikeness is the ultimate objective of our salvation: God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). So to put on bowels of mercies is to be like Christ, and so it goes right down the list. Paul explicitly makes the connection when he sets Christ as the pattern for forgiveness: “as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col. 3:13). It is noteworthy that Paul isolates love as the bond or belt that keeps everything complete and together (v. 14). The essence of this love is selflessness, and who more perfectly than Christ evidenced this selfless love to the climax of giving Himself for His church (Eph. 5:25)? Nothing will spoil, spot, and stain the Christian’s wardrobe more than self. Be like Christ.

In this list of virtues Paul is employing the same literary device of brachylogy that he used to list the vices. These are random representative virtues that imply every conceivable virtue that conforms to and expresses obedience to God’s standard of righteousness, His law, and His Son. Remember that what the world sees in us determines what it thinks of Christ. Ironically, as God sees us, the body, in

Christ, the Head, so the world sees Christ, the Head, through us, the body. That sobering thought should dictate our actions.

Second, Paul details *the method of spiritual life* (Col. 3:15–16). He issues three imperatives to explain how we are to live out our faith. All are in a form that expresses constant and habitual activity, underscoring the fact that living the Christian life is a fulltime occupation.

The first and third imperatives express tolerative ideas: “let the peace of God rule” (v. 15) and “let the word of Christ dwell” (v. 16). This is what should happen, and we should do what is necessary to allow it to happen. The peace that comes only from God must rule in our heart, our inner being where we think, feel, and determine to act. Although this peace could refer to the subjective peace of soul that comes from God evidenced by assurance of faith, confidence in forgiveness, and contentment, I’m more inclined to take it to be the objective peace of reconciliation that Christ accomplished through His blood (Col. 1:20). In a very real sense, the peace of God is summed up in Christ. That may account for the textual variant adopted in some versions that reads “the peace of Christ.” So much in the text focuses on Christ’s death and what we are to think about it that it makes sense that the reconciliation between God and us that Christ has enabled through His blood should also factor into our relationship to the body. The word *rule* is an athletic term meaning to act as an umpire, to arbitrate disputes, to make the calls. Peace with God translates to peace within the body of Christ. That happens when we allow Christ to settle every matter.

We should let the word about Christ (a topical genitive) dwell in us abundantly (3:16). To put it simply, the gospel should be at home in our hearts, where it then impacts every decision, plan, and activity of life. We are to live within the sphere of God’s Word. For this to happen, we must know what Scripture says. *Sola Scriptura* is part of our Reformed tradition, but it must be more than just a component of our creed. Dwelling together implies intimacy, and if we confess love for the Word, it must be more than talk.

Paul uses a series of circumstantial participles to express what the indwelling Word looks like. First, it affects our conversation with fellow believers (teaching and admonishing one another). Second, it directs praise to God by causing us to sing in our hearts the new

song that He has put there by grace by using psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

This, by the way, reflects a little different translation, involving only punctuation. As translated in the Authorized Version, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are the means of mutual teaching and admonition. I prefer translating the verse with a different punctuation, which more naturally links “with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” to singing rather than teaching: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another, with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.” But wherever the comma is placed, it is clear that the indwelling Word of Christ is going to be seen outwardly. That’s our salient point for now. What is inside shows itself on the outside.

Sandwiched between the two tolerative imperatives is the command “be ye thankful” (v. 15). Constant and habitual gratitude is a key component of living out our faith. It is a common theme throughout Paul’s letters and in his personal testimony. No exposition is required at this point. How can we not be thankful when we think of Christ, His work, and what that means for us personally?

Finally, Paul declares *the motive for spiritual life* (v. 17). Why we do what we do is important; motives matter. For the Christian, Christ’s name and glory should be the principal concern in everything thought, said, and done. Scripture disallows the modern—or perhaps I should say postmodern—notion of compartmentalizing life so that religious life is somehow unrelated to everything else. On the contrary, nothing about life is outside the scope of the relationship we have with Jesus Christ. Who Christ is, His authority over us, our identification with Him, our knowledge of His will, and our thankfulness to God for Him all factor into every sphere of life. To say what we say and to do what we do consciously and intentionally in the name of Jesus unquestionably affects what we say and do. Right thinking produces right behavior. We can’t get away from this axiom.

Living out our faith equates to simply living in the reality of the religion we say we believe. There can be no disconnect between belief and practice, between doctrine and duty. Objective truth must transfer to subjective experience. The more we know the gospel and

our completeness in Christ, the more we can enjoy and experience the gospel in life. Theology is the most practical of disciplines and sciences. In the head, we must know the truth; in the heart, we must believe the truth; with the hands, we must implement and evidence the truth. Living our faith starts on the inside and shows itself on the outside.