

## SESSION 9

# Christ's freedom

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Colossians 3:5–11

## BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

Christ enables believers to live free of sinful habits.

## MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The students will identify sinful habits in their lives and will depend on God's help in laying them aside.

## MEMORY VERSE

"But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Colossians 3:8, 9).

## Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Those with pack-rat tendencies hang on to things from decades past. They cram into their storage spaces clothes that are out of style, curtains that have been replaced, sheet sets no longer in use, and old lamps with parts missing or broken. Add in stacks of "important" newspapers and every issue of Reader's Digest and the issue becomes a problem.
- ☐ Do you have packrat tendencies? Would your house guests roll their eyes if they started opening your closets or rummaging through your basement?
- ☐ Read Colossians 3:5–11. Paul called on the Colossians to clean out the sin that was cluttering their lives. His instructions apply to all believers, for we are all susceptible to sinful habits.
- ☐ Challenge your students to take an honest look at the closets and crawlspaces in their lives. Are their favorite sins tucked away there? Have they had a spiritual spring cleaning recently?

## Session Summary

Paul commanded the Colossian Christians to put to death sins associated with immorality and impurity. He also commanded them to put off sins associated with the human spirit and sins associated with speech. He reasoned that such sins belonged to the former, unsaved life. Such actions are possible because of the believer's connection with Christ.



## Session Starters

### Option 1—Comfortable

#### Gather

- An old article of clothing you find comfortable to wear (optional).

#### Steps

1. If you brought an old, favorite article of clothing to class, display it at this time. Share how old it is, why you like to wear it, and why you don't want to replace it.
2. Ask students to describe any old article of clothing or shoes they find comfortable.
3. Transition to the Bible study.

While an old article of clothing or pair of shoes might bring us comfort physically, we must be careful we don't treat sins that way in the spiritual realm. Paul called on the Colossians to be done with the old, comfortable sins, casting them off like an old garment. His instructions form the basis for this session.

### Option 2—Pack-rat Rating

#### Gather

- Whiteboard and markers.

#### Steps

1. Write the numbers from 1 to 10 across the middle of the whiteboard. Have learners come to the board and make a mark that indicates how much of a pack rat they are (10 being extreme pack rat).

**ASK:** How does getting rid of junk around our houses affect our lives? (Q2)

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul told the Colossians to clean out the old sins still hanging around in their lives. We too need to lay aside the sins we have "accumulated." Christ provides the power to lay them aside and then leave them there.

## Bible Study

#### Gather

- Glass of water with food stuck to the inside of it.

God has forgiven believers' sins and declared them righteous, but believers still sin. Nevertheless, believers can live victoriously over sin. Through Christ we can overcome temptation and live righteously.

## **I. The Command Regarding Death (Col. 3:5–7)**

### **A. Put sin to death (3:5)**

**READ:** Colossians 3:5.

Paul commanded the Colossians to mortify once and for all every part of them that was inclined toward sin. Because believers are identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, Paul saw no reason to command the Colossians to crucify themselves with Christ. However, they needed to consider crucifixion with Christ an accomplished fact and to live in dependence upon Christ for strength to resist temptation.

The word "therefore" in verse 5 links the command to mortify sins with the description of our union with Christ given in verses 3 and 4. A large segment of unregenerate society accepts moral pollution, but believers shouldn't. We are children of light, not children of darkness (Eph. 5:8). God didn't call us to resemble the darkness but to rebuke it (Eph. 3:11).

Paul identified specific sins believers ought to put to death. Paul listed fornication, or sexual immorality, first. In the first century, prostitution and other forms of sexual immorality were rampant. The Gnostic belief that the body was inherently evil only fueled the public's indifference to the sin. Many reasoned that it didn't matter how they used their bodies because the human body was hopelessly evil. Believers faced strong temptations in the first century, but they could resist those temptations and lead moral lives. They could offer their bodies to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

As believers, we readily recognize that immorality is wrong. We may also be quick to say that we aren't personally involved in it. A believer, however, can be guilty by association. When we view immorality as entertainment on personal device, we are feeding our minds with that which God clearly condemns.

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 4:3. **ASK:** Can a believer say that watching immorality as entertainment doesn't bother God? Explain. (Q3) *No. God wants believers to completely avoid sexual immorality. No one could view immorality as entertainment without engaging his or her mind and flesh in a sinful way.*

Second, Paul listed uncleanness, or impure thinking, speaking, and acting (Col. 3:5). We must think right if we expect to speak wholesome, edifying words. Unless we think right, we will not act right.

God is unwilling to use impure believers. He wants His vessels to be clean. Paul urged pastor Timothy to keep himself pure (1 Tim. 5:22).

**OBJECT LESSON:** Display a glass of water that obviously has food stuck to the inside of the glass. Ask if anyone in the class would like to drink the water.

**ASK:** How would you react if you were in a restaurant and your water glass had someone else's leftovers stuck to the inside of it? (Q4)

**READ:** 2 Timothy 2:21. **ASK:** What does God think about a little sin stuck to the inside of His "vessels"? (Q5) *He wants us to clean out the filth so we can be vessels of honor, sanctification (set apart for Him), appropriateness, and preparation for good works.*

Third, Paul included inordinate affection or uncontrolled passions and violent emotions (Col. 3:5). Sexual and physical abuse and many other crimes result from uncontrolled passion. Because we live in Christ and He lives in us, we can control our emotions.

Fourth, Paul listed evil concupiscence, a strong desire for evil things (3:5). In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul referred to this sin as characteristic of the heathen (1 Thess. 4:5). In his letter to the Romans, he used the same Greek term to describe the vile affections exhibited in homosexuality (Rom. 1:26).

**ASK:** Why might believers sometimes allow their "private" passions and desires to go unchecked? (Q6) *No other person knows they exist. The believers neglect to remember that God knows the sinful passions and desires exist.*

**READ:** Hebrews 4:12, 13. **ASK:** How should these verses challenge those who let their thought lives run free? (Q7) *They ought to repent of their sins before God and enlist His help in overcoming them.*

Fifth, Paul listed "Covetousness," which may not seem like a very serious sin. But don't miss that Paul identified it as "idolatry." Such an identification should get our attention.

**ASK:** Why is covetousness like idolatry? (Q8) *The covetous person focuses worship and devotion on something other than God.*

**ASK:** In what ways does covetousness, and thereby idolatry, form the basis for most sins? (Q9) *We either want what God wants or what we want. To want what we want, no matter what it is, is to be covetous.*

Covetousness leads to the worship of oneself, another person, or an object. Achan sinned through covetousness when Israel destroyed Jericho. He fed his greed by stealing valuables from God (Josh. 7:21). His sinning caused Israel to experience defeat at the hands of the men of Ai, a small town near Jericho. Israel finally defeated Ai, but only

after Achan's sin was discovered and judged. By elevating material possessions above his esteem for God, Achan had committed idolatry.

**ASK:** How does the world promote covetousness? (Q10) *Through advertising; through celebrity worship; by associating goods and wealth with happiness.*

The fact that God commands us to put to death the sins listed in Colossians 3:5 proves that we can commit them. It also proves that we can terminate them.

### **B. Take sin seriously (3:6, 7)**

The sins Paul listed in verse 5 characterized the first century unbeliever. Not much has changed since then; unbelievers manifest those same sins today. Immorality, impure speech, crimes of passion, and greed are evident throughout the world. The evening news usually opens with a story related to one of the sins Paul listed. In the Tribulation, such sins will be rampant, producing the most decadent civilization since the days of Noah and Abraham.

**READ:** Colossians 3:6.

God poured out his wrath on the world in Noah's day and on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in striking ways, bringing a worldwide flood and raining fire and brimstone. God intends for those judgments to be clear warnings about the wrath He will pour out on present and future disobedient generations of unbelievers. The only way to escape both a sinful lifestyle and God's wrath is to trust in Christ as Savior.

**READ:** Revelation 6:12–17. **ASK:** How does this passage help you understand the seriousness of sin and God's wrath toward it? (Q11)

**READ:** Colossians 3:7.

The Colossian believers had at one time been characterized by fornication, uncleanness, evil passions, and covetousness. They had committed horrible sins. And they were acquainted with being dominated by those sins and feeling helpless to resist them. Believers are no longer slaves to sin. They do not need to obey their sinful desires.

**ASK:** What did you notice about sin's dominance over your life after you trusted in Christ as Savior? (Q12)

Believers will sin at times, but sin should not characterize believers' lives as it did before God saved them.

## **II. The Command Regarding Discards (Col. 3:8–11)**

Isaiah said he will greatly rejoice in the Lord and his soul will be joyful in God because God clothed him with the garments of salvation and

covered him with the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10). Because God has given us garments of salvation and robes of righteousness, we ought to get rid of every item of “old clothes” that is associated with the former unsaved life.

### **A. Discard old sins (3:8, 9a)**

When people clean out their clothes closets for the first time in several years, they often find items that no longer fit them or that are no longer their style. They pull those clothes from their closet and get rid of them. Similarly, believers should examine their spiritual wardrobes and get rid of whatever belongs to their formerly unregenerate life.

**READ:** Colossians 3:8, 9a.

The word for “put off” is used in Hebrews 12:1 to describe the action of a runner stripping himself of every weight. Peter used the same word in 1 Peter 2:1 to exhort us to lay aside specific sins. The idea is getting rid of something that is only slowing down the process of spiritual growth. Imagine a runner wearing a heavy winter coat and snow boots on a hot sunny day. No runner who expects to do well in the race would keep the coat and boots on; he would shed them immediately. That is the picture of a believer who is hanging on to sins. They don’t belong in the believer’s life. They are out of place and need to be discarded.

Paul gave examples of the types of sins believers needed to shed. “Anger” is a habitual ill will toward others. Anger is sinful when a person uses it to attack people rather than to solve problems. It can smolder in the heart and lead to grudges. The anger that feeds the grudge also starves the angry person’s soul. It destroys that person’s peace and joy. It damages his or her fellowship with God and others, and it curtails that person’s ability to minister. If believers would discard their anger, they would save themselves much grief.

“Wrath” expresses itself in open hostility. Wrath is often sudden and sometimes violent. The Greeks pictured it as a spark that hits a pile of highly combustible straw. Moses showed wrath when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it.

**READ:** Numbers 20:10–12. **ASK:** How seriously did God take Moses’ wrath? (Q13) *God wouldn’t allow Moses to enter the Promised Land because of the unbelief behind Moses’ wrath.*

Wrath, as in Moses’ case, betrays a lack of trust in God. It is a reaction against not being able to have complete control of one’s circumstances. Moses didn’t want to show God’s grace by providing water for Israel. He wanted God to show His righteous anger against the people. Moses took control of the circumstances, responded with sinful wrath, and suffered serious consequences.

“Malice” translates a Greek word meaning “badness.” It manifests itself in ill will. It seeks to damage others. It describes the resentment a person may feel toward another. It feeds upon self-pity and harbors an “I’ll-get-even-if-it’s-the-last-thing-I-do” attitude.

**ASK:** What concern is at the heart of a person who shows malice? (Q14) *Those who practice malice are concerned about how badly people make them feel instead of how they might encourage someone.*

Rather than malice, believers should have attitudes of graciousness and forgiveness. Such attitudes help communicate God’s saving grace to the lost and glorify Him in the process.

The next three sins that Paul listed have to do with speech. Blasphemy or slander is the verbal expression of malice. Gossip is also rooted in malice. Speaking evil of others reflects poorly on the speaker, and it hurts the cause of Christ. To slander others, especially in front of unbelievers, is to say, “God so loves the world, but I don’t!”

**ASK:** What would be the opposite of slander? (Q15) *Talking well of people to others; praising their accomplishments and efforts even when the person isn’t around.*

Filthy or obscene language refers to abusive speech, or words meant to inflict harm. There is a filthiness to such speech. Telling derogatory jokes, swearing at others in abusive ways, using racial slurs, and engaging in name-calling should not be part of a believer’s speech. This means believers shouldn’t be liking social media posts or passing along videos or memes that include such language or intent.

**READ:** Ephesians 5:4. **ASK:** Why is giving thanks the replacement for abusive language? (Q16) *Giving thanks includes being thankful to God for the other people He has brought into our lives.*

Finally, Paul told the Colossian believers not to lie to one another (Col. 3:9). Lying takes many forms besides telling outright untruths.

**ASK:** How do believers lie—particularly to one another? (Q17) *They tell each other that they are fine when they are not; they pretend to be spiritually minded; they exaggerate to make themselves seem better.*

Some lies are more subtle than others. Hypocrisy is a form of lying. So are the breaking of a promise and the breeding of misconceptions. If we twist the truth or present only a half-truth, we are as guilty of lying as if we had violated the whole truth. Often malice will prompt someone to spread lies about the object of his or her ill will rather than give the other person an opportunity to present the true picture.

The same Greek word translates as “blasphemy” and “slander.” The context helps determine which English word to use. Blasphemy is against God and slander is against other people. Paul likely meant the sin of slander in Colossians 3:8.



## **B. Reasons to discard sins (3:9b–11)**

### **1. Believers died to sin (3:9b)**

The sins Paul listed in Colossians 3:8 and 9 passed “out of style” when we believed on Christ as our Savior. He died not only to save us from the penalty of sin but also from the power of sin. Sin, therefore, is no longer our master—we have put off the old man with his deeds (3:9). It is as if we have taken off an old garment that stinks and has obvious signs of wear. No one would purposefully put on a stinky old rag of a garment, but believers essentially do that when they sin.

**ASK:** What should we do when we sin against others and are essentially caught donning again the raggedy, smelly clothes we have laid aside? (Q18) *We must admit our sin to those we have offended and to God, asking for forgiveness. We must then put our faith in Christ to help us get victory over the sin and to replace it with attitudes and actions that reflect our new life in Christ.*

### **2. Believers are made new (3:10)**

**READ:** Colossians 3:10.

After teaching that believers have put off sin, Paul gave the positive perspective on what happened when we trusted in Christ. We put on the new man in that we received a new “wardrobe,” full of new attitudes, new desires, new ambitions, and a new outlook on life. As someone observed, we aren’t as good as we ought to be, nor are we as good as we’re going to be, but we aren’t as bad as we used to be.

Paul acknowledged that there is room for spiritual growth in our lives. He indicated that the process of renewal is under way. God’s method of perfecting us includes the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the application of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to shape us into the image of Christ. The better we know and apply the Scriptures, the better we will know Christ and resemble Him. We are being renewed in knowledge after the image of Christ, the One Who made us new. This renewal process will continue for the rest of our lives.

**ASK:** What should believers see as they contemplate where they have been spiritually over the course of their lives? (Q19) *They should see a pattern of growth toward mature Christlikeness.*

### **3. All believers are in Christ (3:11)**

**READ:** Colossians 3:11.

Believers could benefit from a deeper appreciation of what it really means to be family. In the first century, the divides between classes and ethnicities ran deeper than those in the United States today. That they could all come together and see their oneness in Christ as the primary

Colossians 3:12–17 covers in detail the character of the new man. The next session addresses these verses.

factor in their identity was revolutionary. Christ made them one and made them want to be one. The same should be true in our churches.

**ASK:** How should oneness in Christ affect a church's evangelistic endeavors? (Q20) *The church shouldn't use the members' current demographics to inform its outreach strategy. The church should seek to reach all people with the gospel, regardless of their ethnicity or economic standing.*

Many families clean out their closets at the beginning of a new year or early in the spring, but each member of the Christian family ought to clean out his or her "spiritual closet" promptly and once for all.

## Session Application

### Gather

- A worn-out article of clothing.

### Steps

1. Display a worn-out article of clothing.

**ASK:** How many of you would wear this article of clothing to an important meeting or to a special occasion? Why wouldn't you?

**ASK:** While we readily recognize the absurdity of wearing old clothes to important events, we often fail to recognize the absurdity of wearing old spiritual clothes as we claim to live for Christ. Why is that?

2. Cut up the worn-out article of clothing. Give each learner a small piece. Have them tie their pieces to their key chains or put them in a place that they will see often. As you read Colossians 3:5, 8, and 9, have the learners make a mental note of the sins that they need to put off. (Q21) Encourage them to use the small piece of old clothing as a reminder to put off their old spiritual clothes and leave them in the trash heap.
3. Have the learners consider how getting rid of the sins from their lives would affect their lives. (Q22)
4. Encourage learners to write a prayer communicating to God their desire to clear the clutter from their spiritual lives. (Q23)