

Hardly anyone who hears the full story of Jesus and learns the true facts of his life and teaching, crucifixion and resurrection, walks away with a shrug of the shoulders, dismissing him as unimportant. People ignorant of the story or misinformed about it, of course, regularly dismiss him. But with few exceptions, the others know instinctively that they are dealing with a most remarkable greatness.

But it is quite common for those who consider him truly important to include others who seem to be equally important in his company—Buddha, Moses, Socrates, and Muhammad for a historical start, along with some personal favorites. For these people, Jesus is important, but not central; his prestige is considerable, but he is not, preeminent.

The Christians in the town of Colosse, or at least some of them, seem to have been taking this line. (Sound familiar?) For them, cosmic forces of one sort or another were getting equal billing with Jesus. Paul writes to them in an attempt to restore Jesus, the Messiah, to the center of their lives. (We need another Paul? for today?)

The way he makes his argument is as significant as the argument he makes. Claims for the uniqueness of Jesus are common enough. But such claims about Jesus are frequently made with an arrogance that is completely incompatible with Jesus himself. Sometimes the claims are enforced with violence.

But Paul, although unswervingly confident in the conviction that Christ occupies the center of creation and salvation without peers, is not arrogant. And he is certainly not violent. He argues from a position of rooted humility. He writes with the energies of most considerate love. He exhibits again what Christians have come to appreciate so much in Paul—the wedding of a brilliant and uncompromising intellect with a heart that is warmly and wonderfully kind.

*For more introductory material on Colossians, visit <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-colossians/>*

### **Read Colossians 3**

### *Opening*

- In buying clothes, are you a name-brand buyer? A bargain hunter? Spouse conscious? Quality conscious? Style conscious? (Or could you care less what others think? Really?)

### *Digging in — Discovering the Word*

- How are we to grow in our spiritual life (vv.1-4)? How does that contrast with the things that don't lead to growth (see 2:16-23)? How is setting your mind and heart on Christ related to what he has already done for us (v. 1)? To what he will do for us (v. 4)?
- How much contrast is there between the "clothes" of the earthly nature (vv. 5-11) and those of God's chosen people (vv. 12-17)? How hard would it seem to take off the first and put on the second? How is it possible (see 2:6-7, 10)?
- There appear to be two themes in the "clothes" of the earthly nature: the way we speak to each other and sexuality. Why might Paul have focused on these themes instead of others (finances, politics, work, etc.)?
- What practical difference does this "new clothing" make in the relationship between wives and husbands? Between parents and children? Slaves and masters?
- What confirms that all these relationships are to be built around Christ?
- Is the person in verses 12-17 calm, cool and in control or self-controlled but also lavish in his or her love for others? Do you seek to resemble the first or second?

### *Connecting the Dots — Applying the Word*

- We get all too used to "earthly nature" clothing. Which aspect of your old nature feels like a comfortable old T-shirt to you now? Why is it difficult to shed or remove?
- With what piece of Christ's wardrobe would you like to replace it? Which aspect of Christ's character do you need to clothe yourself with, in relation to your husband or wife? Your parent or children? Your employer or employees? A changing relationship?
- How can your small group help with your clothing selection?

(adapted from the Serendipity Bible and The Invitation by Eugene Peterson)