

# The Christian in Colossians

by A.B. Simpson

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*The Christian life is a life of faith, hope, and love, lived out in the power of the Holy Spirit, with the goal of glorifying God.*

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:3-5, Colossians 1:10, Colossians 1:13, Colossians 1:21, Colossians 2:13-14, Colossians 3:3, Colossians 3:10-14, Colossians 3:17, Colossians 3:24

**Topics:** "Hope in Christ", "Christian Character"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the foundational Christian graces of faith, hope, and love as essential to the character of the Colossian believers. He illustrates their transformation from darkness to light, highlighting their redeemed, resurrected, and hidden life in Christ. Simpson encourages believers to embody these principles in their daily walk, speech, and interactions, while also stressing the importance of spiritual education and a joyful disposition. He concludes with a reminder of the hope laid up in heaven, urging Christians to live in readiness for Christ's return.

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## Transcript

"Praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (Col. 1:3-5).

Faith, hope and love, the great trinity of Christian graces, were the foundation of the Christian character of the disciples at Colosse. From these all the graces of the Spirit unfolded in a manifold and beautiful variety and completeness. Nowhere have we a simpler, stronger and more attractive picture of an ideal Christian life.

### I. THEIR EVOLUTION

It was out of darkness. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1: 13). It was out of doom. For they had been under condemnation as the enemies of God. "You, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled," (Col. 1: 21), "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross"(Col. 2: 14). It was out of death. "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2: 13). Dead in sin once, they had become dead to sin now through the cross of Jesus Christ. Crucified with Him they had come forth to resurrection life. They were

risen with Christ, and he could say of them, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

There is something very definite about their experience. It is all expressed in the perfect tense. He "hath delivered us from the power of darkness." He "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." "He hath reconciled us in the body of his flesh through death." "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." "We were resurrected with Christ." "We have put off the old man with his deeds." We have "put on the new man." We are "complete in him." There is no ambiguity, no place for mere hoping and half believing. We have an accomplished salvation, and the great transaction is done.

## II. THEIR LIFE

It is a redeemed life. It was forfeited and brought back by the ransom of the Savior's blood. Therefore it is not our own, but belongs to him (Col. 1: 14). It is a resurrected life. "If ye then be risen," or better, were resurrected "with Christ, seek those things which are above." It is not the old natural life improved. It is something of foreign birth, something that has come to us out of heaven, something that is wholly divine. It is Christ Himself "living in us." It is a life which is hid. "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3: 3). It is hid from the world which cannot understand us. It is hid from the devil who cannot steal it. It is hid often from our own consciousness, and, when we think it gone and mourn our lack of feeling, we find that Christ is still there waiting till the eclipse is over to reveal Himself in unchanging love. The security of our life is not in our experience, but in Him.

John Newton tells us of the singular dream which led to his conversion. Sleeping in his hammock in the Adriatic, he dreamt one night that an angel gave to him a jeweled ring telling him that it was the pledge of his salvation. Soon after a demon form stood by his side and dared him to throw it into the sea. In a moment of reckless madness he yielded to the tempter and the ring was gone. Then the fiend turned to him and told him that he had lost his soul. And at the same moment an awful flame seemed to light up the sea and shore, and a voice whispered that he was lost. Then there appeared another form. It was Jesus. He stood a moment by his side and gave him one look of upbraiding love, and then leaped into the sea. After long struggling with the waves He arose to the surface, and, weary and almost dead, brought back the precious jewel and held it up to his wondering gaze. But He would not let him have it again. "I have rescued your precious soul," He said, "at awful cost, but if I trusted it once more to your keeping, it would be lost again. I will keep it for you, and when you enter the heavenly gates it will be handed back to you as the pledge of your admission." And Newton awoke to seek the Savior, and afterwards to write those precious hymns which tell of His redeeming love.

## III. THEIR DRESS

By a very fine metaphor the Apostle describes the Christian life under the figure of disrobing and robing a person. Our garments are frequently used to denote our character. And so the word habit has come to mean both our dress and manner of living. There is first the process of disrobing. It begins with the putting off of our old habits and dispositions, our old clothes. "Ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another." All this has reference to sinful acts and dispositions. Next, however, we strip not only to the skin, but to the bone, and to the very heart. For we put off our very selves. "Ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3: 8, 9). This is the entire renunciation and crucifixion of our old self and our whole natural life.

Next comes the process of robing. This begins inside. There must be a new man first before he can wear his new clothes. You would not put clean and beautiful garments on an unbathed person. And so we read, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3: 10, 11). This is not the old man improved, but it is the Christ man, the Lord Jesus Himself becoming our new life so perfectly that even our national, social, and ecclesiastical distinctions, peculiarities and characteristics disappear, and Christ is all and in all. Then having put on the new man, we put on the new clothes, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:12, 13). Here we have the fine undergarments of bowels of mercies, a sympathetic, tender sensitiveness to the sufferings and feelings of others, a kind and loving manner, a meek and lowly spirit, a longsuffering patience, the beautiful robe of forgiveness full of pockets that are all open at the bottom, where we receive the wrongs of others to drop them behind us. Then there comes as the last article of our new apparel, the girdle, which in Oriental countries binds all the robes compactly around the person, and enables him to move and work without embarrassment. And so love is our girdle, compacting all our graces into service and enabling us to use our blessing for the blessing of others. This is the meaning of the fourteenth verse. "Over all these things put on love, which is the perfect girdle." Beloved, here is the fashion plate from the heavenly wardrobe for a well-dressed Christian. Let us see to it that we are in the style of the kingdom and the society above.

#### IV. THEIR WALK

As soon as we are dressed it is right that we should go forth to our various walks. First we read of their former walk in evil things. "In which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them" (Col. 3: 7). Next we have the companion of their walk. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2: 6). This is not a solitary walk, but like Enoch they walk with God. Then we have the posture in which they walk, their pose of lofty dignity as the children of a king. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. 1: 10). And finally, we have their walk before the world. In all carefulness and consistency, so deporting themselves as not to bring reproach upon the name of Christ before the ungodly, and to use every opportunity to bear witness for the Lord, and to be a blessing to men. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Col. 4:5). Beloved, is this our walk?

#### V. THEIR TALK

It is not a silent life. Our conversation forms a large part of our activity and influence, and just as the tongue is the best sign of good or bad health in the physical world, so a wholesome tongue is the symptom of true holiness, and an ungoverned tongue setteth on fire the whole course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell. James has said with awful emphasis that "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." Our conversation among our Christian associates is vividly described in Colossians 3: 16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." It is to be flavored with the word of Christ. It is to be illuminated by songs and gladness, and even when we have to admonish and reprove our brethren it is to be with sweetness and love. But especially in our general conversation are we reminded, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4: 6). This is a high standard and excludes a good deal of the light and frivolous and inane conversation even of Christians. We should

never speak without saying something. The salt suggests wholesomeness, purity and good sense. The word grace suggests enough of religion to lift it above the ordinary plane, yet not too much to make it stilted and set. It is possible to talk to the people of the world in such a way as to commend Christ without preaching at them. "That ye may know how ye ought to answer every man," suggests the need of tact and discrimination. "Answer not a fool according to his folly," is just as timely sometimes as the other precept, "Answer a fool according to his folly," is at other times. Christ was the Master of right speech. His noblest victories were in silencing the criticisms and carpings of His enemies by replies which searched their very hearts and exposed them to their own contempt and the ridicule of the people so that "they durst no more ask him any further questions." God give to us a "wholesome tongue."

## VI. THEIR EDUCATION

For just as the child must be instructed so the Christian has to pass through the school of discipline. And so we read, We "do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; . . . increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1: 9, 10). It is spiritual wisdom, and the knowledge of God that formed the subjects of their high study. And the special theme of their deepest inquiry, the philosophy that is more profound than all the wisdom of the ages, is the "mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1: 26, 27). He prays for them in the next chapter that they may know "all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2, 3). This was to be their safeguard against the seductions of false philosophy. This was to save them from "intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" (Col. 2:18). Christ is the wisdom of God and there are depths and heights of truth for those who are taught of the Spirit the deep things of God, truths that satisfy the intellect and feed the heart and bring not only light but life and love.

## VII. THEIR TEMPER

The Christian temper has reference especially to the finer qualities of disposition rather than to the cardinal virtues, moralities and proprieties, which, of course, are taken for granted in a life of holiness. Many of these finer traits are touched upon in this beautiful portrait. Here is a finer touch. "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto," not some great achievement, some eloquent address, some outward activity; but to suffer in sweetness, or as is so finely expressed here, "unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." To suffer, to suffer long, to suffer all not only with patience, but with joyfulness. That, indeed, is a final touch of the refining fire. Here again is a fine touch. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. 3: 15). There is nothing more delightful to the possessor or comforting to his associates than a tranquil, peaceful spirit. There is a delicate charm in the peace of God which sheds beauty and benignity upon the most ordinary countenance and manner. Then we have the heavenly temper (Col. 1: 1, 2). "Seek those things which are above." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." This gives loftiness to the character and lifts the soul above the groveling things of time. Finally, there is the thankful and happy temper which runs as an undertone through many passages in this epistle, "Be ye thankful . . . Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord . . . Giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." (Col. 3: 15, 16, 17.) There is nothing more welcome in this world of clouds and tears, than a cheerful disposition, a shining face, a thankful heart. Of such a spirit one of our simplest poets has said:

"There's not a cheaper thing on earth,  
Nor yet one half so dear;  
'Tis better than distinguished birth,  
Or thousands gained a year."

#### VIII. THEIR PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Of course, their Christian life was a practical one, reaching through a whole circle of domestic, social and public life, making them better wives, husbands, fathers, children, masters, servants and business men. But it is not their practice so much as their principles that the Apostle emphasizes. Christian ethics do not consist so much in a thousand minute directions about the details of duty, as a few sound, comprehensive principles of action which apply to every question and settle every point. Three such principles are given here.

1. "Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. 1: 10).
2. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).
3. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3: 23).

The first of these principles sets before us a high aim and we are inspired to live up to it. We have been lately told that the reason the late Commissioner Waring required his street cleaning brigade to wear white duck suits at their dirty work was because he felt that it would be an incentive to them to keep the streets so clean that their clothes would not be soiled, and he succeeded. And so God robes us in the garments of kingliness, and then bids us live up to it by keeping them clean.

The second of these principles requires us to identify ourselves so fully with Christ that we really act as if we were He. A great actress lately said that when she was acting the part of some strong character she actually felt all the emotions, affections and sufferings required by the play, and that her tears, her smiles and all her expressions were absolutely natural and spontaneous, and for the time being she was really lost in her character. Beloved, God gives to you and me the honor of acting the title role in the greatest drama of the ages. You are permitted to represent the very character of Christ Himself and exhibit to the world the excellencies and graces of Him who is the glory of heaven and the paragon of all goodness, loveliness and grace. Surely this is an inspiration to live up to the highest things.

Then the third of these principles, a single aim to glorify God, is as far-reaching and uplifting in its power. A distinguished clergyman once told the writer that he announced a special sermon on popular amusements, and great numbers of young people came to hear it. He did not once mention cards, dancing or the theater, and yet two at least of his auditors went home that night saying to each other, "I will not play cards, I will not go to the theater, I will not indulge in the worldly dance again." He had simply brought home with convincing power to the hearts of his hearers the single verse, "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things which please him." This will accomplish more to lift people above the world than all our denunciation of forbidden things.

#### IX. THEIR HOPE

"For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (Col. 1: 5). This was one of the things for which he thanked God. "To present you holy and unblamable and unreprouable in his sight" (Col. 1:22). This was the glorious purpose of Christ's atonement. "That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1 :28). This was the holy ambition of his own personal ministry, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3: 4). This was the glorious transfiguration which the Lord's coming was to bring to them. "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:24). This was the recompense for which they were toiling at their lowly and servile task. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1: 12). This was the present preparation for the Lord's coming which His grace had bestowed upon them, and this is the attitude in which we still should be waiting for His coming; meet now and ready always that we may be found of Him in peace. Thus would He have us waiting for His appearing. It has lately been stated that the great Von Moltke, who planned with such signal success the victorious campaign of the German army against France, had been ready for many years for that expected event, and when one night an orderly knocked at his door with a message from the king that war was imminent, he simply directed the orderly to go to a certain pigeonhole in his office where he would find all the directions to the different commanders with all the necessary papers ready for instant delivery. And there they were, the plans of the campaign, plans of fortresses, orders to generals of divisions, all ready; and then he turned over and quietly went to sleep. He had been ready for years. So should we be diligent that we may be found of Him in peace, and that when He cometh we may open to Him immediately. So may we be found meet for the inheritance of the saints of light.

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