

Colossians 3:01-17 **Grabbing Euthyphro by the horns.**

Introduction: The conversation took place in the student lounge in the basement of Baird Hall at U/B when I was in college. My friend threw a problem my way – something from his philosophy teacher. I’ve since learned the name – the Euthyphro Dilemma and it goes back at least to the time of Plato.

We might word it something like this: *Does God command something because it is good, or is it good because God commands it?* Each answer posed a problem for me as a relatively new Christian.

1. If God commands something because it is good, then the standard for good must be something higher than God.
2. If something is good because God commands it, then “good” seems kind of arbitrary. God might have commanded kidnapping, slavery, rape and the killing of senior citizens. Would those things then be good?

I was baffled – and remained baffled for several years really. How can there be a standard higher than God? But what if God had really commanded other things?

The solution is found in today’s passage: God is personal and so He has a certain character. That is, certain qualities are essential to the “nature” of God. His commands, then, are an expression of His nature. He is the ultimate good and His commands are always consistent with His character – or, who He is by nature. His commands are the faithful expression of these essential character traits.

Up until now Paul has been arguing against false teachers in Colossae who were detracting from the supremacy of Christ. In chapter 3 he begins teaching the Colossian believers how they should live. Paul wants us to understand who God is before telling us to “do the right thing.” This helps us to understand that when we obey God we are imitating Him. Good works, virtuous character traits and right thoughts are a faithful expression of God’s Holy Spirit working within us. They are a reflection of who God is.

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| I. | Seek those things which are above. | 3:1-4 |
| II. | Put to death whatever sin is within you. | 3:5-7 |
| III. | Put off your old self and put a Christ-centered identity | 3:8-11 |
| IV. | Put on all those qualities that conform to the image of Christ. | 3:12-17 |

God is good. He wants us to be good. When we do what He commands, we consciously imitate Him.

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| I. | Seek those things which are above. | 3:1-4 |
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- A. Paul is talking to believing Christians. Eternal life began for us the moment we were born again. Have you experienced the new birth? You now have every right to consider your pre-Christian life a thing of the past. This is now the reality in which you live:
 - i. You were raised with Christ (v.1)
 - ii. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. (v.3)
 - iii. You will appear with Christ in glory. (v.4)
 - B. Jesus Christ is your life. Don’t let this fallen world obscure your vision of eternity.

Matt 6:33 NKJV *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

*“Aim at heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”
(C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, HarperCollins e-book, p.127)*

God is good. He wants us to be good. When we do what He commands we grow to be more like Him.

II. Put to death the sin that’s within you.

3:5-7

- A. 3:5 How do we deal with deep-rooted patterns of sin? We put those things to death. If you died with Christ and now have His resurrection power working within you, then you have the ability to conquer sin, to get rid of your former practices.
 - i. Go through the list and consider what place each of these might still have in your life. Then get to work in killing the sinful behavior.
 - ii. When Paul says to “put [these things] to death” he trying to show us how serious sin is in God’s eyes. We need to deal with it very severely.
- B. 3:6-7 Nobody likes to think of the wrath of God. We might say God doesn’t even like to think of it. But wrath is necessary because God is holy. Sin is a very real rebellion against a most holy and virtuous love. Jesus died to save us from our sin. We have no need to keep walking in these old patterns – no matter how deep-rooted they happen to be.

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III. Put off your old self and put a Christ-centered identity.

3:8-11

- A. 3:8 More things to “put off”: *anger* is the under-the-surface hatred while *wrath* is the violent expression of anger. *Blasphemy* can be understood as “evil speaking”, but especially things like slander and gossip that destroy another person’s good name.
- B. 3:9 **Putting off the old man with his deeds** means a complete rejection of our pre-Christian self, all of these vices and sinful behaviors. Don’t hold on to a past identity.
- C. 3:10 **The new man**, is the new you made in the image of God. Sin corrupted the old self we once were. The person that we are now is remade in the likeness of Christ. Therefore we need to begin living up to our new identity in Jesus.
 - i. Consider Paul’s prayer at the beginning of the letter:

Colossians 1:9-10 NKJV ⁹... we ... do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- D. 3:11 All ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-economic barriers are broken down when we are in a right relationship with Jesus.
 - i. We all stand equally guilty before God because of sin. We are all made perfectly righteous before God by the blood of Jesus Christ.

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IV. Put on all those qualities that conform to the image of Christ. 3:12-17

- A. 3:12-14 These behaviors are consistent with the Christian life. When Paul tells us to “put [these things] on” he reminds us that we do this intentionally.
 - i. These are not arbitrary commandments. This is what God is like. This is how God want us to be. This is what we will become when we “seek those things which are above.” (3:1)
- B. 3:15 If we want to experience God’s peace, we have to “let the peace of God rule in [our] hearts.” When I want to worry about things, God will usually let me, but if I let Him fill my heart with His peace, then He is happy to do that.
- C. 3:16 It all starts with being in the Word so that the Word can richly dwell in us. From there it moves to encouraging one another through teaching, spiritual songs etc.

John 8:31-32 NKJV ³¹Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³²And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

- A. 3:17 Finally it progresses to **whatever we do in word or in deed**. All that we do should be done in the name of Jesus. Paul refers to this another way in Romans 12:

Rom 12:1 NKJV I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**

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Conclusions:

- Notice the similarity between this passage and the on walking in the Spirit that we find back in Galatians. That similarity is intentional:

Galatians 5:16-26 NKJV ¹⁶I say then: **Walk in the Spirit**, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴**And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** ²⁵If we live in the Spirit, **let us also walk in the Spirit.** ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

- Here is how it all works together:
 1. We need the Scriptures, the word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit, in order to learn what it is that God expects us to do.
 2. We need to be intentional about rejecting behavior and thought patterns consistent with our old life.
 3. We need to be just as intentional about doing what God calls “good.” These are the virtues expressed in 3:12-14 or in Galatians as the fruit of the Spirit.
 4. We need the Holy Spirit to empower to consistently do God’s will.

- Finally let’s consider each virtue Paul mentions in 3:12-14:
 1. **Tender mercies** We might also say a “heart of compassion” toward the sufferings of others.
 2. **Kindness** A mellowing of our nature, as wine with age, but with an active quality to it.
 3. **Humility** An attitude of mind involving a deep realization of our unworthiness to receive God’s marvelous grace.
 4. **Meekness** Calmness toward God in particular, accepting His dealings with us as good rather than accusing Him or blaming Him for our troubles.
 5. **Longsuffering** Self-restraint before taking action, not taking revenge even when you can.
 6. **bearing with one another** Having patience with one another’s errors or weaknesses.
 7. **forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.** This is a lot like “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”
 8. **But above all these things put on love**, which is the bond of perfection.

*“The only evidence the unsaved world has that we belong to God is our godly lives.”
(Warren Wiersbe)*

- **Does God command something because it is good?** Yes, but there is no standard higher than Him. His commands arise out of His character – which is the standard for goodness or virtue itself.
- **Is something good because God commands it?** Again yes, but His commands are not arbitrary. His commands arise out of His character – which is the standard for goodness or virtue itself.

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