

Study in Colossians

Session 6

After warning the Colossian believers about the three heresies being taught by the Gnostics in the area through showing them to overwhelming significance of Jesus Christ, Paul then makes an appeal to living the Christian faith and describes something of what it looks like. In this section (Colossians 3:1-11) since self-made religion and self-abasement don't hold any value in overcoming the flesh, Paul discusses with the Colossians what truly does work in the spiritual realm. In this section we'll see Paul encourage Christians to not only give attention to the inward experience of God but also to the outward relations with his fellow man.

I. The foundation of the Christian life [Read Colossians 3:1-4]

A. After explaining how ascetic regulations do nothing in restraining the flesh, he expounds on the only true remedy for sinful passions is found in the believer's experience of union with Christ. In this union, the believer dies to sin and the world's way of thinking and behaving. These are the positive counterpart to last week's discussion of Colossians 2:16-23. The good news is that since we died with Christ, we have also been raised with Christ and participate in the resurrection life. It is the resurrection life of Christ that once released into the believer's life is a power more than adequate as a check against the appetites of the former lower nature. In these four verses, Paul points to the Christian's union with Christ as being the foundation of the Christian life.

1. Seek out heavenly things. (3:1)

a. NASB - "If then", NIV - "Since" - Paul is setting up a condition of the first class here which means that the condition is true. This is the other half of Colossians 2:20. That verse dealt with the death of the believer with Christ and 3:1 deals with the positive side of baptism, the resurrected life with Christ.

b. "seek" - this word means to set your heart upon something, to set this desire above other things and then strive for what the heart is set upon. It really has much more to do with the heart than the activity. It begins inwardly as a consuming desire and that leads to any subsequent actions. If your interests are centered around Christ, then one's allegiance to Him will be above all other things/people. "Keep seeking" is present imperative - it means that it is a command to be on-going. It is to continue habitually as the foundation of the life of faith in Christ.

c. "seated at the right hand of God" - is another way to dispel the teachings of the Gnostics. Christ's role as mediator of the covenant between God and man cannot be diminished as the 'right hand' is a metaphor for the place of supreme privilege and divine authority.

1) **Luke 22:66-71** - When Jesus identified Himself as the one at the right hand of the power of God, the Pharisees understood Him to mean that He was God's Son and divine.

2) This was the statement used to prove Him guilty of blasphemy, which would have been true of anyone but Jesus, the one they were condemning.

d. In other words, if you set your heart's desire upon Christ and the things of Christ, you will find yourself living the resurrected life of Christ here on earth full of spiritual privilege and authority.

Q: What are some of the heavenly things we should be seeking out? What are the aspects of the resurrected life of Jesus that Christians are to continually seek/ set their desires upon? (*contrast them with the things of this world sought by the lost and carnal*)

2. Set your mind on things above. (3:2)

a. “setting your mind” - keep on thinking about the things above. Like v.1 - it is present imperative - a command to do something continually.

b. Whereas v.1 speaks about aim, the practical pursuit of the life of faith in Christ, this verse speaks to your mental disposition. You can’t only seek heaven with your heart but you also need to think about heaven with your mind. This speaks to making the thoughts of our lives centered around the things above - not of this world. Paul isn’t speaking of withdrawing from life and becoming a monk in a lonely monastery or hermit in a cave. The believer is to maintain his normal relationships in this world but with a mind set that is concerned primarily with the kingdom of God.

c. When Paul speaks of “things above”, heaven is a convenient term to describe God’s kingdom and all that He has for His children - now and in the future.

d. **I Corinthians 2:14-16** - We have the mind of Christ. Thus Christians are able to think the thoughts of Christ, to know how to think about matters of this life and what Christ would want done. Again, this shows us the complete dependence upon Christ and His indwelling Holy Spirit in order to experience this level of mental intimacy with the Lord and His will.

e. A quick side note on “things that are on earth”. Not everything in the world is evil. Some things are but not everything. Yet, even harmless things, if allowed to take the place that is reserved for only the Lord in our minds, become destructive. It’s good to take the things of on the earth as the typical pursuits such as wealth, power, influence, pleasure, comforts, etc. If one becomes preoccupied with these things, as opposed to the kingdom of God, one’s mind drifts off course into dangerous waters. Those who are preoccupied with the kingdom of God look rightly look forward to God’s glory being revealed in all the situations of life.

Q: What percentage of your day do you spend thinking about the things above?

Q: In what ways do you think your life would be different if you experienced the mind of Christ, which all believers have, more often?

3. The motivations for seeking and setting (vv. 3-4)

a. Paul reminds the Colossian believers of a definite event which took place in their lives which led to our union with Christ. **Romans 6:1-4**

1) “have died” aorist tense - punctilinear action. All that is alien to Christ should be alien to the believer - especially those things which are expressly sinful in nature.

2) “hid” - perfect passive - our lives were hidden with Christ’s life by God Himself. We did nothing to earn this state nor did we have anything to do with this state coming about. It was all God. Being perfect tense means it not only happened in the past but it was fully completed in the past - there is nothing left to be done to have one’s life hidden with Christ.

3) “hid” - means to hide, conceal or be locked up together with. Our lives have been locked up together with Christ and concealed in such a manner as that no one or no force

can steal us from God's possession and control.

4) Just as the believer died with Christ, again we see the believer has been raised with Christ to a new life. Not only are the lives of Christians secure in Christ but that our real lives, that which is our true essence belongs to the invisible spiritual realm. Our spirits, the innermost part of who we are is already in heaven hidden from this world in Christ. **Ephesians 2:4-7**

5) This reveals a motivation for living the Christian life with the full passion of one's heart and mind. It is who we truly are. One day this life will be revealed fully upon Jesus' return but until then we can experience the fulness of Christ in our daily lives by continued faith in Him through seeking and setting.

b. Another motivation for seeking the things above and setting our minds on those same things is that future manifestation of the believer's life with Christ in glory. This is because Christ truly is our life. **Romans 8:10-11**

1) "revealed" - this is the same word we get our word epiphany from. It's an uncovering or making visible that which was invisible or hidden.

2) the second case of revealed in v.4 is future passive. It means it will happen for certain but it will be done to us by God. So when Christ returns, this life which is Christ's will be openly revealed in us for all to see. We know from our previous study, this is when we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor. 15). The veil which now shrouds our lives in Christ will be withdrawn.

3) In a practical sense then, if this is who we are, then all Christians should be seeking the things above and setting their minds on the things above because that's where their future is. Why waste the time given to us in this world by focusing our affection and attention upon the world to the exclusion of the kingdom of God, where we will be for eternity?

4) The world, which persecutes, despises, ignores Christians now will be blinded by the dazzling glory of the revelation of the sons of glory when Christ returns. That's the motivation Paul is discussing with the Colossians.

II. The structure of the Christian life [Read Colossians 3:5-11]

A. The "therefore" at the beginning of v.5 lets us know that what follows builds upon the foundation laid in vv. 1-4. Since the Christian's vital union with Christ is the true foundation of a believer's life, Paul wants the Colossians to know what that life looks like. What does the structure built upon faith in Christ mean in practical terms? What is essential to understand is that none of what Paul is expressing here is regulation or a new version of the Law. Those things have no value in rooting out the issues of the flesh. Rather, since the new life is Christ's life and His life is to so fully control and express itself through us, this is just how that new life will be manifested outwardly. Paul's underlying thought in this entire section is this: Let the life that is in you by the virtue of your union with Christ work itself out in your experience. Like immigrants to a new country, Christians need to learn the ropes of the new life in the new country. There are three imperatives (commands) in this section. Those show us the breakdown of Paul's teaching to the Colossians in this section. (put to death - v.5, rid yourselves - v. 8, and do not lie - v.9)

1. Sins that are to be put to death (vv. 5-7)

a. "put to death" - put to death or treat as dead. (NASB consider and dead are same word) This is a very strong verb. It implies that we are not merely to suppress or control evil and

vice but rather wipe them out completely. All sin must be exterminated. The aorist imperative means the action at hand must be taken decisively and at once - with a sense of both urgency and finality. Since the believer's life is the temple of the Holy Spirit, he is not to go to the extreme of license as the some of the Gnostics taught. The Colossians died to the old way of life in becoming Christians and now need to show that death a reality in everyday life. Paul then gives a few examples of what he's been talking about. These may have been sins prevalent in the Colossian society.

1) immorality - sexual immorality, fornication, anything dealing with sex outside marriage. Originally it meant to consort with prostitutes but the word became the general word in Greek culture for sexual immorality. This is the word we get our word pornography from.

2) impurity - uncleanness of thought or action. It certainly also contains sexual immorality within it but has a much wider scope than the previous word

3) passions - lust, suffering from a passion. While in Greek literature the word could have a positive or negative connotation, in the New Testament it always has a negative connotation. This is because it means a controlling emotion or desire that leads one away from the Lord.

4) evil desire - a more general term for lust and passions. While passions were usually, but not always associated with sexual lusts, these "evil desires" could be associated with any bad or negative or sinful emotional draw.

5) greed - coveting - this is a compound word in the Greek that means "to desire to have more". It suggests not being satisfied with what the Lord has provided and instead have a drive to want more. One of the pitfalls of this sin, as described by this word, is the ruthless or careless disregard for others in one's attempt to get more. Notice that Paul links says this greed amounts to idolatry. It makes a little god out of one's desire to have more of this world. This word depicts the pagan world's way of life.

b. (v.6) Paul never depicts sin as mild or harmless. According to Romans 1:18-32 it is because of this attitude that the wrath of God will be revealed against lost humanity. It is brought forth here to the Colossians so that they can know the seriousness of failing to put these things to death violently. Christ had to die to pay for these sins and the lost will face the wrath of God because of them. Yes, they are serious.

c. (v.7) Both of these verbs are in a tense relating to the past which indicates that those actions and attitudes belong in the past tense for believers.

1) "Walked" is aorist. The believers used to walk in sin, it was who they used to be, but that time has now passed and that death of sin has continuing impact upon their lives in the present time. In this, the aorist is summing up the entire life of sin into a single point and then brings the believer to that point in order to put it death in one's experience.

2) "is living" is imperfect tense which means it is continuing action in the past time. In the past, the believers were living in sin but no more. This talks about the course and habit of their past existence in sin. Whereas walk deals with the outward conduct, what was visible in their lives.

2. Sins to be put away (v.8)

a. "put them aside" - means to lay off or lay aside - while what is discussed was once used or useful to the person, it is now being laid aside because it is of no longer any use. It was often used of old and dirty clothes that were taken off and not used again. What is important is that this verb is middle tense which means the subject (the Christian) is in some way participating

in the action to make it happen. It is aorist which means it happened in the past but will have continuing implications in the present. So, believers were to put these things aside in the past and leave them discarded.

- 1) anger - impulsive wrath
- 2) wrath - outburst of anger, rage
- 3) malice - wickedness that leads to trouble, badness, viciousness

All three of these sins are sins of disposition. They reveal a disposition that isn't love or anything else of the Holy Spirit who lives in each believer.

- 4) slander - abusive language, blasphemy, railing against another
- 5) abusive speech - filthy speech or that which abuses another both meanings

could be summed up as foul-mouthed

These are sins of speech.

3. Do not lie (vv. 9-11)

a. Whatever the reason for lying receiving its own special place in this list of sins, one thing is clear, it means it is being emphasized as vital. The verb is present imperative which means it could be translated "Stop lying!"

b. Since you've taken off the old self and had a radical life-changing experience with Christ and now has a new set of clothes on, they are not to be sullied by participation in the old fleshly way of life. It was acceptable in the world to some degree but not in the life of Christian faith.

1) This new self is being renewed in knowledge. The new life does not grow old or wear out because it's constantly being renewed by new knowledge of the it's Creator, Christ.

2) This verb is in the present tense meaning constant, habitual renewal is the natural life of the believer. As a believer lives and experiences life, that life is directed by God. As such those experiences all lead one to additional knowledge of the Lord, His nature and working, and this new knowledge gives a renewal to the mind and heart.

c. Lastly, this renewal is available to all who come to Christ for salvation. There are to be no barriers to people coming to Christ or serving Him together. The physical distinctions evident and often time amplified by this world serve no spiritual purpose and they do not hinder true fellowship between people of faith in Christ. In Christ all distinctions have passed away. He is all there is or needs to be.

Q: What distinctions do we make today concerning our fellow Christians?

Q: How should we react to the distinctions between us and other believers?

Christ is our all in all. Anything else is to be laid aside like a dirty set of clothes.

Q: Are there any rebukes, rebuttals, questions or comments?