

Jesus Christ

The Image
of the
Invisible God

An Exegesis of the Epistle to the Colossians

Study 7 Not Carnality but Christ (Colossians 3.1-11)

Look at Colossians 3.1-2

Paul encouraged the Colossian believers to turn away from their false teachers, reminding them of their union with Christ. He also urged them to continue living in keeping with their position in Christ. He urges them to "seek those things which are above" and to "set their minds on things above."

Seeking those things which are above

"This preoccupation with 'things which are above' is not born of wistfulness, as though one can find relief from the pressures of the world only by looking to a better world. It is not an effort to detach oneself, to find escape. Rather, it is the attitude found in Christ during the days of His flesh, who lived in the bosom of the Father even as He continued His strenuous labours among the children of men."

(Harrison, EF. 1971 *Colossians*. Everyman's Bible Commentary series)

"The description of Christ as 'seated at the right hand of God' is another implied rejoinder to those who were seeking to diminish Christ's role as mediator, inasmuch as the right hand of God is a metaphor for the place of supreme privilege and divine authority."²²⁸

(Vaughan, Curtis. 1978 "Colossians." In *Ephesians-Philemon*. Vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 volumes)

The Greek verb translated "seek" conveys the idea of setting one's heart on something long term and then looking forward to it with growing emotion. As Christians, we are to live in the light of the imminent return of Christ, making eternal priorities the basis of our moral compass.

Set their minds on things above

We should continually "set" or fix our minds on the "things above" (ie of heaven) which includes but is not limited to our spiritual blessings in Christ, our hope, our Saviour's desires for us, our heavenly home, etc. rather than on the things that are only physical and temporal. They should occupy a large place in our thought lives and we should take intentional time to sit quietly and meditate on these things.

". . . from now on the Christian will see everything in the light and against the background of eternity. He will no longer live as if this world was all that mattered; he will see this world against the background of the larger world of eternity. He will, for instance, set giving above getting, serving above ruling, forgiving above avenging. The Christian will see things, not as they appear to men, but as they appear to God."

(Barclay Op Cit)

To **set your mind on things above** means to focus ones will and emotions on the spiritual reality of Heaven, and letting that control one's motivations, rather than getting caught up in earthly concerns. This should be a lifelong pattern for those who follow Christ (Psalm 73.25). Staying in God's word renews the Christians mind, arms him or her for spiritual battle, and makes the faithful ready to triumph over temptation

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Look at Colossians 3.3-4

What does it mean to be hidden with Christ in God? In order to gain a clear understanding of this question, a grasp of the aorist and perfect tenses in Greek is necessary. Here are two simple, easily understood definitions to help you:

Aorist past tense

Implies an action that happened in the past that is not time specific. It is something that happened at some time in the past

Perfect present tense

Similar to the aorist past tense, the perfect present tense also implies an action that happened in the past that is not time specific, but is an action that has a continuous, ongoing effect

Paul says in Colossians 3.3 "For you died (Aorist past tense) with Christ." This part of the statement describes the moment of our salvation, that moment in the past when the Holy Spirit baptised us into the body of Christ and we became a child of God. He then goes on to say that "your life is hidden (perfect present tense) with Christ in God." According to Johnson this statement suggests three thoughts:

- Our life draws nourishment from secret springs (cf. John 14:19; Phil. 3:20).
- Our life is as safe as a deposit locked in a bank vault.
- Our life is one with Christ, who is in the bosom of the Father.

(Johnson Op Cit)

Christ's death enables Christians to die to their old life and makes their new life secure (John 10.28-29; Galatians 2.20). Through Jesus, God has placed a double lock on the security of their lives – nothing can harm them, for His followers are in Christ and Christ is in God. A Christian's true identity and purpose in life are hidden with Christ. So people outside of Christ will not understand a believer's motivations and goals.

(Jeremiah D. 2013 Jeremiah Study Bible)

"When" or in some versions "whenever" indicates that a revelation of Christ in the future is certain, but its time is unknown. The Greek word *phaneroo* ("revealed") stresses the open display of Christ at His coming. This is probably a reference to the Rapture. When He is revealed to us then, our lives will no longer be hidden in Him, but "revealed" for what they are in our glorification ("with Him in

glory"). The Rapture will be a glorious revelation of Christ to us, but it will also reveal us in our glorified state. Now our eternal life is hidden (v. 3), but then it will be manifest.

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Paul has covered every phase of life: God's people have been raised with Christ in the past. They are hidden with Him in the present, and they will appear with Him in the future. They may be hidden now, but they will not be hidden forever. At the rapture of the Church we will appear with Him in glory, that is, in our glorified bodies.

Look at Colossians 3.5

On the basis of their position in Christ, Paul urged his readers to separate from the practices of their former way of life. He did this to enable them to realize in their experience all that Jesus Christ could produce in and through them. Three imperatives indicate Paul's main points:

- consider as dead (lit. put to death, v. 5)
- put aside (v. 8), and
- do not lie (v. 9).

"This practice of reckoning dead finds an excellent illustration in the gardener's practice of grafting. Once the graft has been made on the old stock the gardener is careful to snip off any shoot from the old stock that may appear. So, in the believer's life, since he has now been grafted into the Last Adam and His new life, he must by the Spirit put to death any products of the old life that may appear (cf. Rom. 8:13)."

(Johnson Op Cit)

Paul's first list deals with sexual practices. Lists of virtues and vices were common in the ethical systems of the ancient world, and the imagery of putting off and on was also well-known.²⁴⁴

- "Immorality" (Gr. *porneia*) refers to illicit sexual intercourse.
- "Impurity" (*akatharsia*) in any form is in view, especially moral impurity in this context.
- "Passion" (*pathos*) means uncontrolled illegitimate desire, "like an inward fire that is kindled in the heart."²⁴⁵
- "Evil desire" (*epithymian kaken*) means any evil desire in a more general sense, reaching out for some forbidden thing to satisfy itself.
- "Greed" (*pleonexian*, lit. "desire to have more") is any materialistic desire, including lust, that disregards the rights of others. It is "the arrogant and ruthless assumption that all other persons and things exist for one's own benefit."

(Caird, G B *Paul's Letters from Prison*)

"Every sin is basically selfishness, the worship of self instead of the worship of God, the substitution of self for Christ, in one's affections (cf. Col. 3:1-3)."

(Hendriksen, W. 1979 *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians and Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*)

Look at Colossians 3.6-7

"The Christian must kill self-centeredness; he must regard as dead all private desires and ambitions. There must be in his life a radical transformation of the will, and a radical shift of the centre. Everything which would keep him from fully obeying God and fully surrendering to Christ must be surgically excised."

(Barclay Op Cit)

Does this displeasure of God with these sins extend to Christians? Are we subject to the "wrath of God?"

Hebrews 13.4-13 provides an answer to this question:

⁴ *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

⁵ *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

⁶ *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

⁷ *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

⁸ *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

⁹ *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

¹⁰ *For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

¹¹ *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

¹² *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;*

¹³ *And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

Look at Colossians 3.8-9

Paul's second list deals with sins of speech:

- "Anger" (Gr. *orge*) is a settled attitude of hostility.
- "Wrath" (*thymos*) means a verbal outburst of evil passion.
- "Malice" (*kakia*) is ill will, a vicious disposition that results in hurt to one's neighbour.
- "Slander" (*blasphemia*) refers to insulting, injurious, malicious speech in general.
- "Abusive speech" (*aischrologia*) means filthy, disgraceful, dishonourable speech.
- *Lying* (*pseudesthe*) refers to deceptive, distorting, untruthful speech.

The imperative command against lying is very strong. Paul literally said:

"Never lie!" The reason given (v. 9) applies to all the preceding activities. The "old self" is the person the Christian was before God united him or her with Christ"

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Look at Colossians 3.10

The "new self" is who the Christian is after his or her union with Christ. Verse 10 describes the process of individual sanctification, in which the new self is being "renewed" or "renovated" into Christ's image. "True knowledge" (*epignosis*) is full knowledge of God and His will. Sanctification results in increasing likeness to Christ. Only by sanctification can people attain to the full image of God and Christ that God created them to bear (Gen. 1:26-28).

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Look at Colossians 3.11

There is *no* national or racial "*distinction*" that determines one's acceptability to God or that puts him or her in a better position in relation to God, nor is there any religious, cultural, or social distinction. Jesus Christ is essentially "all" that we need for new birth and growth, in contrast to the additives that the Judaizers promoted. He indwells every believer and permeates all the relationships of life. "In all" probably means that Christ "is everything" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28; Gal. 3:28). A "barbarian" was one who did not know Greek; his or her language was foreign. They came mainly from Western Asia and the Black Sea region. "Scythians" originated from the Black Sea and Caspian Sea area, and the Greeks thought of them as the lowest type of barbarian. Paul often used "Greek" to describe anyone who practiced Greek culture, not necessarily a Gentile or a pagan or a native Greek (cf. Rom. 1:13-16). Whereas to the Jews, the world was divided into Jews and Gentiles, to the Greeks and Romans it was divided into Greeks and barbarians: those who were educated in Greek culture and those who were not.

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Summary Statement

"The new man lives in a new environment where all racial, national, religious, cultural and social distinctions are no more. Rather, Christ is now all that matters and in all who believe. The statement is one of the most inclusive in the New Testament and is amply supported by the preeminence of Christ in New Testament theology. It is a particularly appropriate statement for the Colossians and affords an excellent summary statement of the teaching of the letter. There are three realms, relevant to the Colossians, in which He is all. He is everything in *salvation*; hence there is no place for angelic mediation in God's redemptive work (cf. 1:18-22; 2:18). He is everything in *sanctification*; hence legality and asceticism are out of place in the Christian life (cf. 2:16-23). He is our life (3:3-4). Finally, He is everything necessary for human *satisfaction*; hence there is no need for philosophy, or the deeds of the old man (1:26-28; 2:3, 9-10). He fills the whole life, and all else is hindering and harmful."

(Johnson Op Cit)