

Book of Colossians - Colossians 3:1-17

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Colossians 3:1-17 ²

The Context

Last week we discussed Colossians 2 wherein Paul dealt with various competing distractions from the simplicity and completeness of the believer in Christ.

- ◆ Worldly philosophy (Col. 2:8)
- ◆ Legalism (Col. 2:16-17, 20-22)
- ◆ Asceticism/False Humility/Self-imposed Religion (Col. 2:18, 23)

A common element to all of these distractions is a misplaced focus by the believer upon the things of this world rather than Christ. The appeal of these worldly distractions to the believer is an indication of how "alive" we are to them and shows our lack of identification with the death of Christ. In effect, we have not truly "died" to this world, but continue to be enthralled with it as an alternate master.

Paul now sets forth our true identity, having died to the world and our old nature, we are to put on the new man made in Christ's image.

Set Your Mind on Things Above (Col. 3:1-4)

Col. 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Col. 3:2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Col. 3:3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Col. 3:4 When Christ [who is] our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Newness of Life

- ◆ **Death and Resurrection** - For you died (Col.3:3) and were raised (Col. 3:1). Paul is emphasizing our transition when we were born-again. We focus on the resurrection, but often minimize the dying aspect. Resurrection can only come after death. Paul emphasizes our death because death is

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2 New King James Bible. TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982.

characterizes by a total inability to respond to external stimuli.

- ◆ **Confused Identity** - We are all excited about 'life in Christ,' but where is our true identification? Where do we 'set our minds?' "Set your mind" (φρονεῖτε) is **present**, active, imperative: "**be continually setting your mind**". The idea is "**to direct one's mind to a thing, to seek, to strive for.**"³
- ◆ Why do we call ourselves "Christians," but then live like the world?
- ◆ **Seeking God's Hand or Face?** - Why don't we live lives which are commensurate with the message of Christ? Could it be that we want "God's goods," but not God Himself. Could it be that we seek to identify with His blessings, but not with His experience?
- ◆ **Life Hidden with Christ** - If our life is "in this world," then we have not died and our life is not truly "hidden with Christ." We are worshiping a false God: our desires, the appeal and applause of the world in the place of the One True God. How does this compare with Christ [who is] our life (Col. 3:4)? Hidden: **concealed from human eyes because it is laid up in heaven**⁴ The idea is that the life of the believer is **kept safe**.⁵
- ◆ **Paul's Implied Question** - If then you were raised with Christ, why are you acting like you did prior to your death? How did you rise with Christ, yet skip death? Resurrection can only come after death. Do you still need to die? Have you bypassed a key step of identification with our Lord? Are you truly His?

Torn Between Two Lovers (Idolatry)

As Christians, are we torn between our love for the world and our love for God? Are we seeking intimacy with this world before intimacy with God? This is idolatry.

- ◆ **A Doomed Love Affair** - When we set our minds on the things of the world, we are, in effect, chasing the wrong lover. History is a continual reminder that Christians are not of this world. Within restricted geographical areas and periods Christianity may be tolerated or even flourish, but Jesus explained the general outcome would be one of enmity, "**If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore**

3 Strong, James. The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order. electronic ed. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996.

4 Arndt, William, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur, Page 454. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, c1979.

5 Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., LN 93.615. New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989.

the world hates you. "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.'" (Joh 15:19-20). We are essentially like the nation Israel, chasing a false god with empty promises and who will not deliver. Meanwhile we are not giving our entire focus to the One True God Whom we claim died for us. Like Israel, our love affair with this false god is guaranteed to turn sour as the world turns on us.

- ◆ **World is an Unworthy Lover** - The world is not worthy of the attention of those who are Christs. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- **of whom the world was not worthy.** They wandered in deserts and mountains, [in] dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, (Heb 11:35-39)
- ◆ **Earth Dwellers or Aliens?** - Claiming to be aliens (sojourners, pilgrims) with citizenship in heaven (Ps. 39:12; Php. 3:20; Heb. 11:13; 1Pe. 2:11), we live our lives like "earth dwellers" (Isa 26:21; Lu 21:35; Re 3:10; Re 6:10; Re 11:10; Re 12:12; Re 13:8; Re 13:12; Re 13:14; Re 14:6; Re 17:8) whose focus and goals are the things of the earth. Yet, like the Levites of the OT, believers have been made priests unto God (1Pe. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Those primary purpose of a priest is to minister to God. We have no inheritance in the world: **Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I [am] your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.** (Nu 18:20)
- ◆ **Stunted Sanctification** - We want eternal life, but our lives evidence an unwillingness to 'die to the world.' We want to 'dabble with God' while keeping our head, hands, and feet firmly planted in this world. We cannot grasp what God has for us because we will not let go of what we are chasing or have obtained from the world. We are like the proverbial monkey with his fist stuck in a jar grasping a banana which he will not let go. The result is a stunted sanctification - we are not truly set apart to God.
- ◆ **Response to Persecution** - Those who have not yet "died to the world" will have the greatest challenge in times of persecution as they must "die all over again." If we have truly died to the world through Christ, then we are already dead and nothing more can be taken from us (Rev. 12:11).

We will appear with Christ in Glory

- ◆ **Christ is Our Life** - He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25) and the only path to eternal life (John 14:6).
- ◆ **Our body will be transformed** - Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk,

as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end [is] destruction, whose god [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame--who **set their mind on earthly things**. For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body**, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Php 3:17-21). The creation eagerly awaits our revealing, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:18-23).

Put Off the Old Man (Col. 3:5-11)

Col 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Col 3:6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

Col 3:7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

Col 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

Col 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

Col 3:10 and have put on the new [man] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Col 3:11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian⁶, slave [nor] free, but Christ [is] all and in all.

- ♦ **Put to Death** - The old man with his ungodly passions and practices is dead. Being dead, he no longer responds to the world (external stimuli). Are we attempting to walk toward Christ while dragging a dead corpse (the old man) with us? Cut him away! "He's dead Jim!"
- ♦ **Idolatry** - Paul identifies covetousness as idolatry (πλεονεξίαν is from πλεονέκτης, "one eager to have more, especially what belongs to others"⁷ This word is itself made up of two Greek words meaning "much or more" and "to have or hold on to.") In contrast, dead men should be characterized by an inability to hold on to the things of the world. The common element to the sinful actions Paul lists is an underlying desire. This desire is self-directed rather than God-directed. It is dedicated to the service of self rather than God and is therefore, idolatry: the service of a false god.
- ♦ **Wrath Coming** - The wrath of God is coming in two specific ways. Firstly, upon the earth in a

6 Scythians were considered the wildest of Barbarians (those who spoke a foreign, unknown tongue).

7 Strong, James. The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order. electronic ed. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996.

specific time of judgment known as the Tribulation (Isa. 13:9, 13; 63:3; Rev. 6:16-17; 15:1; 16:7; 19:15). Secondly from God's wrathful judgment. Believers are saved from both of these: from the outpouring of God's wrath on the earth by the appearance of Christ (1Th. 1:10; 5:2-11) and from the wrath of God's judgment by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9).

- ◆ **Sons of Disobedience** - Nonbelievers are subject to God's wrath (Jn 3:36 ; Ro 1:18 ; 2:8 ; Eph 5:6 ; 1 Th 2:14-16 ; Re 14:9-10). It is impossible for nonbelievers to please God. **For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those [who live] according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded [is] death, but to be spiritually minded [is] life and peace. Because the carnal mind [is] enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** (Ro 8:5-8).
- ◆ **filthy language** - Are people whose language is filled with cursing sensitive and aware to their use of each filthy term? Generally not. They are desensitized. In a similar way today, many believers have no idea they are utilizing terms which from God's perspective are a violation of the 3rd commandment (Ex. 20:7). We may not think our language is filthy, but the question is does God?
- ◆ **Put Off, Put On** - to unclot ourselves of the practices of the old man, having been clothed with the new man. In our born-again experience, the old man was killed (died with Christ) and new man was created (2Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). The old man with his ungodly passions and practices is dead. Being dead, he no longer responds to the world (external stimuli). Both the old man and the new man are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26), but the new man is continually being renewed in knowledge according to the image of Christ. We are not to walk any longer as unbelievers do (**Eph. 4:17-20**).⁸
- ◆ **Renewed in Knowledge** - ἀπεκδυσάμενον, present, passive, participle - the one continually being renewed. A work in progress, continually undergoing renewal. Our knowledge (epignwsin, understanding) is intimately involved. Christian sanctification is not primarily experiential. It involves a renewal of our understanding. Where does that renewed understanding come from? The Word of God (John 8:31-33). Contrary to the teachings of many in Christianity today, scripture does not attribute renewal to experience. This is a post-modern emphasis which is foreign to scripture. ("My truth is my truth and your truth is your truth. My truth is based on my experience - what works for me.") Instead, scripture reveals a single objective standard: God's Truth, which all believers are to be renewed by. This process requires the use of the mind since it involves knowledge and understanding (Col. 1:9; John 17:3; 2Cor. 3:18; 4:6; Eph. 4:23-24). This knowledge includes an intimate familiarity: **1Jn 2:3-6**. We cannot be conformed into an image we do not know!
- ◆ **according to the image of Him who created [the new man]** - The new man was not "made with

8 Notice that the context of grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) implies it is primarily our treatment of other people which is in view. We can grieve the Spirit by our relational sins, all the while thinking we are ourselves seeking God.

[human] hands," but is a direct creation of God. This is why believers are "sons [and daughters] of God" - their born-again origin is not of human means, but a direct generation by God (Joh 1:12; Ro 8:15; 2Co 6:18; Ga 4:7; 1Jo 3:1; Re 21:7). This is why we share the title "son of God," similarly to Adam (Luke 3:38), Christ (Luke 1:35), and the angels (Ge 6:2; Job 1:6; Job 2:1; Job 38:7; Ps 89:6). It is our destiny - we are predestined - as believers to be conformed into the image of Christ (Ro 8:29; 1Co 15:49; 2Co 3:18; Php 3:21).

- ◆ **neither Greek nor Jew** - Old distinctions are done away with by our position in Christ. There is no distinction in value or standing among those who are in Christ (Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-18). Yet role distinctions remain (Gen. 3:16; Ecc. 9:9; Eph. 5:22, 25; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1Ti. 2:12).

Put On the New Man (Col. 3:12-17)

Col 3:12 Therefore, as [the] elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

Col 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also [must do].

Col 3:14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

Col 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Col 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.

Col 3:17 And [whatever] you do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

- ◆ **Tender mercies** - the things we are to put on are tender (gentle and restorative) mercies (undeserved favor). Our problem in our culture (and therefore our worldly Christianity) is we have an unbiblical notion of "our rights." Mercy and rights are incompatible: you cannot exalt your "rights" and at the same time exercise mercy because mercy is undeserved. If God were to exercise His "rights," there would be none saved. Notice how each of the following words places a burden on the one exercising the mercy: humility, longsuffering, bearing, forgiving, love (suffers long, thinks no evil, bears all things, endures all things, etc. 1Cor. 13:4).
- ◆ **Bearing** - Carrying a burden. Christian fellowship is not a detached solo experience. It is not like a lone rock climber ascending the heights to meet with God on the pinnacle. It is a "group trek" through the wilderness where more capable and mature members help the weak and struggling near the back of the pack. Victory and elevation of any individual which comes at the neglect or loss of

another is out of God's will.

- ◆ **Forgiving** - Probably the largest inhibitor to growth in the body of Christ is lack of forgiveness. Lack of forgiveness destroys relationship, which grieves the Spirit (Eph. 4:30-32). Many believers who nurse a sin are blissfully unaware of the sin. You can teach on it until the "cows come home" and they'll even tell you what great teaching it was, but then go right on in their old pattern - never suspecting that the very topic God's Word is dealing with is a problem for them. And so it is with lack of forgiveness. One clue for detecting lack of forgiveness in our own life: do we repeat the same statements (often veiled accusations)? Do the same themes or people rise to the surface in our discussions with others? There should be no room for "repeat business" in the believer's heart.
- ◆ **even as Christ forgave** - We gratefully reach out for the forgiveness which we have in Christ, but refuse to forgive much more trivial matters (Mtt. 18:28). God, Who is in a perfect position to judge has forgiven us, but we, who are faulty judges, refuse to forgive others. Even when we say we have forgiven someone, our actions indicate otherwise - we continue to hold on to the offense.
- ◆ **bond of perfection** - Bond (σύνδεσμος, that which binds together). It is used to describe ligaments by which the members of the human body are united together. Perfection (τελειότητος, reaching the end or goal, reaching maturity). Love is the "glue" which holds the mature believer together with other believers in situations which would typically result in separation. When relational difficulties arise, our flesh which is self-seeking, urges us to walk away from the situation and "blow it off." This is one reason why we have such an independent, isolationist culture. We are optimizing the individual at the expense of society. So it is within families, so it is within churches, so it is within the nation and world. We disguise this by many fancy words (independence, freedom, etc.) but it is simply the sin of selfishness. It is a sign of our immaturity. Why do so many marriages fail? Because true love is lacking and idolization of self reigns instead. True love is sacrificial in nature and has no rights.
- ◆ **peace of God** - The peace that comes from or originates with God. This peace includes several aspects. 1) We have been reconciled to God and are no longer His enemy (Rom. 5:1). We may not feel this peace, but it is a positional reality which is extremely important. 2) We have the peace which surpasses understanding and is founded on our trust in God (Isa. 26:3; Col. 3:15). 3) We have peace due to a renewed spiritual mind (Rom. 8:6; Php. 4:7). Trust in God is foundational to all of these: **You will keep [him] in perfect peace, [Whose] mind [is] stayed [on You], Because he trusts in You.** (Isa 26:3).
- ◆ **word of Christ dwell in you** - The Word of Christ (God) is to dwell (ενοικεῖτω, "in [your] house"). It is to "set up residence" and abide in us. In order for the Word to abide in us, we must abide in it (John 8:31-32). Many passages underscore the critical importance of God's Word in the lives of those who are His (Ps 119:105; Ps 119:160; Ps 138:2; Jer 15:16; Ho 4:6; Mt 5:18; Lu 16:17; Lu 24:27; Lu 24:44; Joh 5:39; Joh 8:31; Joh 14:26; Ac 8:35; Ac 17:11; 2Ti 2:15).
- ◆ **teaching and admonishing** - These are present, active participles: be continually instructing

(didactically teaching) and continually warning/exhorting/admonishing. Admonishing (νουθετέω, from "the mind" and "to set or lay down upon"). To lay things down on the mind ('imprint') requires meditation. Brief devotionals and chasing proof texts will not modify the mind as is intended.

- ◆ **spiritual songs** - Songs empowered and directed by the Spirit. The response of God to worship at the dedication of Solomon's temple serves as a pattern (2Chr. 5:12-14). This phrase also implies the possibility of unspiritual songs. Songs offered to God in the flesh which do not originate with His Spirit. Are we guilty at times of 'disconnected worship' where we are singing, but not truly worshipping?
- ◆ **deeds in the name of the Lord** - Deeds giving credit to His person and character as if done directly for Him (Col. 3:23-24). Deeds done in His name can either honor or malign the Lord. How often do we think we are serving God's will, but actually opposed to Him:

"They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service." (Joh 16:2).

"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in **Your name**, cast out demons in **Your name**, and done many wonders in **Your name**?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Mt 7:22-23)