

## 11/4/2021 – Colossians, The Faithful Disciple

### Unit IV: Lesson 1, A Faithful Disciple Lives in a New Dimension

#### Reading: Colossians 3:1-17

#### SUMMARY

By a transitional particle Paul indicates that he will now draw the conclusions for Christian living that the new life in Christ requires. The Christian has not only died to the old life and the elemental spirits, he has a new life in Christ. **CHRIST HAS BEEN ELEVATED TO THE POSITION OF HIGHEST SOVEREIGNTY AND PERVADES ALL THINGS. THE NEW LIFE IS VIEWED FROM AND LIVED FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE!** The Christian's "mind" – his way of seeing things and thinking about things – has been changed and keeps on changing in Christ. This new perspective is hidden from the unbelieving. They do not recognize that God's people live in a whole new dimension.

As part of that new life, the Christian puts to death the old life. **CHRISTIAN MORALITY AND ETHICS ARE NOT AN IMPROVEMENT OF THE OLD LIFE. THEY ARE TOTALLY NEW!** Through a series of *three pentads* (groups of five), two of vices and one of virtues, Paul shows how completely new the life in Christ really is. Not only is the new life characterized by new moral standards and behavior, but **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS LIVED IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT TRANSCENDS ALL OF THE RACIAL, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL BARRIERS THAT CHARACTERIZE THE OLD WAY! CHRIST IS THE UNITING FACTOR.** Through Christ comes the power of love and peace which conquers the attitudes that destroy relationships and fill men with every form of covetousness, ill-temper, and self-assertiveness.

The key to all this is the thankful spirit which recognizes and lives by grace and can therefore live in mutual forbearance, forgiveness, and love. That spirit expresses itself in the rich, warm, and free worship, song, and living of the Church. The guiding force of this new life is that everything is done “in the Name of the Lord Jesus.”

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### Verse 1:

"if then" – The Greek here signals a resumption of the argument begun in 2:20. Paul will now draw the conclusion. **NOTE THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN 2:20 AND 3:1.** In 2:20 Paul asserts that the Christian has died with Christ in his baptism. In 3:1 he will draw the corollary conclusion. The Christian has also risen with Christ to a new life.

"the things above" – This is the sphere in which Christ lives and reigns. **BECAUSE CHRIST HAS BEEN ELEVATED TO THE POSITION OF HIGHEST SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE UNIVERSE, HE PERVADES ALL THINGS WITH HIS PRESENCE!**

"where Christ is, . . . right hand of God" – Traditionally, the one who exercised a king's dominion was seated at his right hand. Christ has dominion over the entire universe. **NOTE**

THAT ALL CHRISTIAN MORALITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IS ALWAYS BASED ON GOD'S ACTION IN CHRIST. BELIEVERS HAVE NO LIFE OF THEIR OWN. THEIR LIFE IS THE LIFE OF CHRIST, MAINTAINED BY CHRIST HIMSELF AS THE EXECUTOR OF GOD'S POWER.

**Verse 2:**

"set your minds" – The verb here and in verse one (seek . . . . set your mind) are both present tense, indicating a continuing attitude. We might translate, "keep on seeking . . . keep on setting your mind . . . ." Paul is saying that THE COLOSSIANS SHOULD NOT LET THEIR AMBITIONS BE EARTH-BOUND, SET ON THINGS THAT ARE TRANSITORY. LOOK AT LIFE FROM THE EXALTED POSITION OF CHRIST'S RIGHT HAND AND JUDGE EVERYTHING FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THAT NEW CREATION TO WHICH YOU NOW BELONG!

**Verses 3-4:**

"You have died " – What Paul means is that the Colossians have died to the old life, the old age, and all the old standards that prevail under sin.

"your life is hid with Christ in God" – The believer' s life is secure because his new life in Christ, NOT VISIBLE TO THE CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD ("hid"), belongs to and is maintained by Christ and through Him by the Father. HERE IS A MAIN TENET OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY. TWO AGES EXIST SIDE-BY-SIDE. THE OLD AGE UNDER SIN AND DEATH (and the elemental powers and spirits) AND THE NEW AGE IN JESUS CHRIST. OUR NEW LIFE WILL BE MANIFESTED WHEN THE GLORY OF CHRIST IS MANIFESTED ON THE LAST DAY. UNTIL THEN, IT IS "HIDDEN."

Compare Philippians 1:21, 3:20, I John 3:2.

**Verse 5:**

"therefore . . . ." – As in almost all of the Pauline letters, the application of the great things God has done in Christ begins with a solid "Therefore . . . ." Compare Romans 12:1, Ephesians 4:1. CHRISTIAN MORALITY AND ETHICS ARE ALWAYS BASED ON GOD'S ACTION IN CHRIST AND ARE THEREFORE NOT ACHIEVEMENT BUT RESPONSE!

"put to death" – This is far more radical than what the heretical teacher was proposing. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT AN IMPROVEMENT ON THE OLD LIFE. THE OLD LIFE MUST BE COMPLETELY DESTROYED AND REPLACED WITH A NEW LIFE!

**Verses 5, 8, 12:**

Note how Paul lists the vices and the virtues. He uses three *pentads* (groups of five). Paul is probably imitating a practice of Greek moralists who commonly listed virtues and vices in groups of five. The first pentad is in verse 5 and contains the gross sins of appetite. The second is in verse 8 and concerns particularly the sins of temper and tongue. The pentad of virtues is in verse 12 and is really a summary of social virtues as the Christian relates to others.

**Verse 5:**

"fornication" – This is often the first vice on the list (Rom. 1:24, Gal. 5:19) after idolatry itself because it severs so completely from Christ.

"passion and evil desire" – This is the kind of person who is a slave to his passions and driven by the desire for the wrong things.

"covetousness, which is idolatry" – The Jewish rabbis and Stoic moralists both regarded covetousness as the fountainhead of evil. COVETOUSNESS IS IDOLATRY BECAUSE IT MEANS SETTING OUR AFFECTIONS ON EARTHLY THINGS RATHER THAN THE THINGS ABOVE.

**Verses 6:**

"wrath of God" – This is not an emotion in God as the English might suggest. It means the day of judgment. Romans 1:18-32 gives us a picture of God's wrath at work, giving men up to what they are without Him and to the inevitable dissolution of life that follows.

**Verse 7:**

"you lived in them" – When the Colossians had their minds set on the sphere of visible things as pagans, they, too, were under the wrath of God.

**Verse 8:**

"put them all away" – This phrase suggests the discarding of an old garment. The contrast is with verse 12 "put on." The pentad in verse eight matches the one in verse 12.

"anger, wrath" – The first suggests a sudden flame of fury, the second is a continuing, settled attitude.

"malice" – The desire to harm one's neighbor is what's meant.

"slander and foul talk" – Slander means "reviling someone." "Foul talk" here means "loud abuse" rather than dirty jokes.

ALL OF THE VICES IN THIS VERSE FLOW FROM A BITTER AND VENGEFUL SPIRIT AND DISPOSITION TOWARD OTHERS.

**Verses 9-10:**

"put off" – The verb here is the same word in 2:15 for "disarmed" and indicates a note of victory won over sinful habits. THE CHRISTIAN IS AT WAR – BUT FIRST OF ALL WITH HIS OWN HABITS!

"new nature . . . renewed" – The Christian life is anything but static. It is a "growing into" the new nature created by Christ and given to us. Martin Luther once described the Christian life as "*ein ewiges Werden*" – an eternal becoming.

"image of its creator" – This phrase draws on Genesis 1. As man was created in the image of God and that image was effaced by sin, so in Christ the image is being restored. NOTE AGAIN THAT CHRIST IS THE MEASURE OF THE NEW MAN!

**Verse 11:**

This is a glorious verse! All the barriers of racial ("Greek and Jew"), cultural ("barbarian, Scythian"), and social ("slave, free man") come down in Christ. For "Christ is all" (absolute preeminence) and "in all" (Christ dwells in all believers).

NOTE: THIS VERSE EXPLAINS WHY JESUS BEGAN NO SOCIAL REVOLUTIONS, WHY OUR LORD ENLISTED NO ARMIES TO DEFEAT HIS ENEMIES, WHY ST. PAUL SENT THE SLAVE ONESIMUS BACK TO PHILEMON. THE CULTURE IS NOT THE ENEMY, THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE IS NOT THE ENEMY, OTHER PEOPLE ARE NOT THE ENEMY. SIN AND THE POWERS OF EVIL ARE THE ENEMY! THIS IS THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THE MIND "SET ON THINGS ABOVE" – VIEWING LIFE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE WHERE NONE OF THESE HUMAN DISTINCTIONS MATTER ANY LONGER!

**Verse 12:**

"Put on" – Paul now picks up the other half of his metaphor. If the Christian has "put off" the works of the flesh, what shall he wear? A new pentad appears in this verse.

"chosen ones, holy and beloved" – ALL THREE OF THESE TERMS ARE APPLIED TO ISRAEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. THE CHURCH IS THE NEW ISRAEL, THE NEW PEOPLE OF GOD!

"Compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience" – Against the bad temper and self-assertiveness of the pagan Paul lists the social virtues which reflect the Christian's relationship to others.

"compassion" – Literally the word means "heart of pity." Mercy is not our normal disposition!

"kindness" – The word means one who regards his neighbor's welfare as being as dear as his own.

"lowliness" – The idea is humility. THIS WAS REGARDED AS WEAKNESS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD. Christian humility springs from the recognition of our creatureliness. We are all created by the one God.

"meekness" – This is the person so totally dependent on God that he is angered only by what angers God but is never angered at the wrong time or at the wrong things.

"patience" – This is the person who never gives up on people in their foolishness, insults, bitterness, and ill-treatment of others.

**Verse 13:**

"forbearing one another . . . forgiving one another" – NOTE THE MUTUAL NATURE OF THESE PHRASES. It isn't just the need to forgive others. They will have to return it! WHAT A DIFFERENCE IN SPIRIT BETWEEN THIS KIND OF MUTUALITY AND THE SELF-SEEKING OF THE Gnostic SYSTEM!

**Verse 14:**

"love" – This is the crowning grace of them all. Above all, Paul reminds them, is love. Love does others nothing but good and is, therefore, the "bond" which makes harmony. DIVISION AND DISSENSION ARE ALWAYS THE EVIDENCE OF SOMEONE'S LOVELESSNESS!

**Verse 15:**

"peace of Christ rule" – The Greek literally says, "Let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts." WHEN DIFFERENCES THREATEN TO SPRING UP AMONG CHRISTIANS, THE "ARBITRATOR" IS THE PEACE WE HAVE IN CHRIST. Paul thus goes on to remind them they are called into one Body. CHRIST IS THE ONE WHO RULES AND UNITES!

**Verse 16:**

"teach and admonish one another" – THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT VERSE. THESE FUNCTIONS ARE APOSTOLIC IN 1:28. HERE THEY ARE APPLIED TO THE CONGREGATION AS WELL. EACH MEMBER OF THE CHURCH SHOULD ACCEPT HIS SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF ALL. Not only the pastor, but the congregation as well must accept this responsibility.

"psalms, hymns, spiritual songs" - "Psalms" probably means just that – psalms from the Old Testament were sung. "Hymns" are probably Christian canticles such as the one Paul uses in chapter 1 about Christ. "Spiritual songs" are probably unrehearsed words sung "in the Spirit" by members of the congregation. Here we see the richness and diversity of early Christian worship. The predominate note, however, is THANKFULNESS.

**Verse 17:**

"everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" – This verse is a short course in Christian ethics. It suggests that nothing begin without PRAYER, AND THAT EVERYTHING IS UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST ("in the name of . . ."). Acting in Christ's name, it would be impossible to do anything which is contrary to His Spirit.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What does it mean to “set one’s mind on the things that are above”? Does this mean we are heavenly day-dreamers? Illustrate how one lives this kind of life.
2. How is our life “hidden with Christ in God”? Can you illustrate in your own experience with unbelievers that this is true?
3. There are many moral systems and moral people around us who are not Christians. What is the difference between Christian morality and other types of morality?
4. What is the “mind-set” that produces the two pentads of vices in verses 5 and 8? What is Paul’s “solution” to this problem. Illustrate.
5. How does the life in Christ “subvert” all the racial, cultural, and social barriers that men erect? What does this say about our involvement in issues of social justice? How can we best demonstrate the new life in Christ?