

Colossians 3.1-11

Recap. Paul has

- Given thanks for the Colossians
- Exalted Christ – pre-eminent over all things in heaven and on earth
- Written of his own ministry and love for them
- Exhorted them to walk in Christ. “rooted and built up in him and established on the faith” (as instructed by Epaphras)
- Warned them not to be deceived or led astray by false teachers
- Warned them not to let anyone disqualify them for not obeying human traditions; not to submit to regulations which have no value

In what is the climax to that section, Paul does 3 things: **SLIDE #1**

1. He exhorts them to seek, and to set their minds on, the things that are above
2. He insists that they put to death what is earthly in them
3. He insists they ‘be who they are’ – reminding them that their true identity now is in Christ;

vv. 1-4

Here = set out the 'two lives' of the Christian. **SLIDE #2**

First Life: Life before Christ.

- a. Life in the flesh – driven by earthly desires + fallen nature
- b. In and of this fallen world (citizenhip)
- c. In Adam: enslaved to sin, doomed to die

Second Life: Life in Christ (for those born again), with God

- a. Life in the Spirit (cf. Romans 8, esp. 1-11)
- b. Aliens/exiles in this world (citizens of heaven)
- c. Dead to sin, alive in Christ: no longer enslaved to Sin – Jesus is Lord/Master!

BUT, this second life is in two stages:

It has already begun/been entered into ("For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" v.3),

BUT

it is not yet what it will be ("When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" v.4)

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Cf. 1 John 3.2f. "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is."

Cf. 1 Peter 1.3-5

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Now:

- Already dead to sin and alive to Christ
 - In this world but not of it;
 - still in an earthly body which will fail;
 - no longer a slave to sin, yet still prone to sin.
- Still waiting for the glory of God to be fully revealed

The Not Yet to which we look forward:

- This perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When ...(this happens)... then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:
“Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15.53f.)
- Christ revealed in glory, all raised/meet him in air -> earth cleansed and renewed and united with heaven, with Jesus Lord over all and reigning over all

Cf. Exodus

1. Freed from slavery
2. In wilderness but travelling to Promised Land

Colossians, and all Christians, freed from Egypt but not yet in Promised land.

What Paul does is what a good travel agent does: he **SLIDE #3**

- Depicts beauty of destination: we're in the picture AND we're with the most important person/people in our life
 - reminds us we've already committed to the journey (since/seeing as, not 'if'); in fact we've at the hotel and about to set out for beach/shops... or should we go back to the airport???
- ⇒ Surely NO turning back, why would you?

Why do we?? Like the Israelites after being freed from Egypt

Exod 16.1-7 Num 11

Eyes look down, or back. Loose our vision/focus.

Mind plays tricks: the old life was not so bad... in fact it was pretty good...

BUT, we have been raised with Christ! Have a hope and future. Old *was* bad.

- ⇒ Seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above,

vv.5-10

Having exhorted them to persist (vv.1-4),

Paul must revert to warning them again:

since you have died (to sin), “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...” i.e. be what you now are – live it out! (move to vv.5-10)

In 2.8-23 had warned against being persuaded to drawn to worthless religion = additional rules/regulations, other spirits etc. as if our salvation in Christ somehow lacking something

Now the danger is quite simply the lure of the old life, the temptation to fall back into the old way of walking.

Paul frames this list of sin in 3 categories:

5 SEXUAL SINS – Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness (which is idolatry)

2 SINS OF ANGER - Anger, wrath

4 SINS OF THE TONGUE - Malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth, lying

Representative of all that is ‘earthly’.

Paul’s real concern though is why they should revert to the old life:

- Presumably not open rebellion apostasy (cf. 1.3ff.)
- Weakness/lack of discipline
- Wrong desires – worldly/hedonistic/fleshly goals
- Wrong ambitions – instead of humble, servant hearts, competitiveness, rivalries, jealousies
- The delusion of thinking can live in 2 worlds at once and still please, even serve Christ. No need to choose between flesh/earthly desires and heavenly ones, can have both, e.g. can serve both God and mammon – what William Blake called the marriage of heaven and hell.

C.S. Lewis Preface to *The Great Divorce* (April 1945)

William Blake wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*... in some sense or other the attempt to make that marriage is perennial. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable ‘either-or’; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain.

You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind... If we insist on keeping Hell (or even earth) we shall not see Heaven: if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell.

NT Wright:

There is to be no gentle, half-hearted approach to such things, no toying with them as continuing possibilities. They are like vermin that musn't be allowed into the house in case they poison the food or the water supply. They are not to be pitied. They are to be killed off, put to death.

- Equally the delusion that we can fulfil the desires of earthly life first, then fully devote our lives to Christ Cf. Luke 9.59-62
2nd man: "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him
3rd man: "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."
Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

And parable of the great banquet – Luke 14.12ff

- Bought field
- Bought oxen
- Married a wife

Image of having put off old self and put on (Christ) – so now growing in God's image.

To revert back = involves a radical change: putting off of Christ and re-putting on old self.

NO COMPROMISE.

v.11

Finally, he reminds them that their whole identity is now in Christ - who is all, and in all.

He has already reminded them that Christ "Has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (1.13).

i.e. they are exiles and aliens in this world; their citizenship is in heaven.

Cf. Phil 3.19

(Speaking of those who walk as enemies of the cross) Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

The old identity markers are no longer significant – culture, religious background (before conversion), race, social status... all are one in Christ, and all called to the same life – to walk in the light and be radically different from the world.

The this-worldly asceticism of Colossians = remarkably akin to that of the *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* (pron. Diog-kneetis ; early Xian apologetic dated between 130-200AD).

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they preach some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric way of life. This teaching of theirs has not been discovered by the thought and reflection of ingenious people, nor do they promote any human doctrine, as some do. But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries, but only as non-residents; they contribute in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign... They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What do you think Paul means by “seeking/setting your minds on the things that are above”? How can we apply this to our own lives?
2. What do you think it means that our lives are “hidden with Christ in God”?
3. What do you think it means that we will appear also with Christ in glory? What will that look like?
4. How do we “put away” earthly passions and desires? Perhaps someone will be able to testify about how they have done this.
5. What do you think Paul means in v.10 when he says that our “new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator”?
6. Of the reasons offered in the sermon for putting on the old self again (sexual immorality, anger, lies etc.) which do you find most challenging? Are there are other factors which incline us to such behaviour?