

SECTION 7: To Higher Things 1: Aspirations and Practice

Colossians 3 1-11

3: 1. Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5: Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

6: Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

11: Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Having warned the Colossians of the dangers of deception and destruction, Paul's main emphasis now is on the positive - and the practical. He wants them to appreciate that they are *'new creatures'* with a new life to be lived out.

I love to tell the old story about the man who was laying a concrete path and the next door neighbour's Alsatian would jump the fence and walk through the wet concrete. This happened three times before he went to the neighbour and said, *"If your dog comes into my garden again, I'll take a gun and shoot it."*

His neighbour said, *"I thought you liked dogs?"* to which he replied: *"I do in the abstract, but not in the concrete!"*

As in many of Paul's letters, he is seeking to give concrete guidance in Christian living. In this next section, the emphasis is on the potential and reality of their experience.

Paul very often starts with the theology and then moves on to the practical outworking of that theology in the lives of people. He is really interested in theology when it touches our lives: it starts in heaven with God and what He has done for us but it must have its outworking in our lives.

The basis of that theology is the gospel: what Christ did for us and how that impacts and transforms our lives.

When we put our faith in Christ, we accept forgiveness through His death on our behalf. Indeed we 'die' with Him. And, then, as He rose from the dead, we are 'born again'; we are raised with Him. As Paul says in Galatians

2: 20, "*I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

(The New Testament representation of that process is baptism: the end of one life and the beginning of the new. In our practice of baptising infants at parents' request on the basis of the covenant promise and consequently using only a token amount of water, there is a danger that we may overlook the significance of the theology of this experience.)

Having passed from death into life, and being '*risen with Christ*' the Colossians were now to take action to appreciate fully what it meant to be '*new creatures*' and to taste '*those things which are above*'.

In sport, they often talk about the *follow-through*. That is what these believers were being exhorted and encouraged to do: to follow through.

What does Paul say that will help us aspire to greater levels of living? He mentions several factors.

1. Our focus on Christ

- Motivated by history -

There is a great tradition in Scripture and a practical application of looking back and so to be reminded of what God has done; what He has commanded; and to see His dealing with people in order that we can understand His nature. We are being told to look at what Christ has done, and because of that we are to make certain applications to our lives.

Our sins are forgiven and we are joined to Christ in His resurrection.

- . Prompted by exhortation -
- Keep seeking the things above. This is not something that we do and then forget. I still remember the time at school when we were given injections against TB. There was a great deal of apprehension, but once it was done it was done!
- . Encouragement through prospect.
- There is something to look forward to. We will be with Christ in Glory. He is in a position of power, might and majesty; and He is with us now.

2. Focus your minds and your hearts.

- . We have to have our hearts and our desires in the right place. There must be a desire; there must be willingness; there must be a love. One of the great weaknesses of the church is a lack of zeal.

People don't get excited about the things of God, or the power of God, or the love of God.

Do you really love God? Or do you just say it?

- Set your mind on things above.
The mind is a very powerful battlefield. What you think will govern how you live your lives and what you will do. It is important that we have a right understanding of the new life. A lot of what Paul has been saying is about understanding who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

The question might well be asked: what is your frame of mind; what is your mind set? What do you think of when you have nothing specific to think about? Where does your mind go? You should think on the things of God and on the things of Jesus Christ.

- Christ is our life.
We have to know that and live that. He is our life in the future; but He is also our life now. Because we have been born again, He lives His life out in us. As Paul says in Romans 5: 10: *If we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.*"

3. We are to put off the old self - everything that is the opposite of love.

We are to have control over what we do.

Paul chooses two examples here:

- Sexual sin - lust instead of love, and
- Social sin, relationships.

Sexual sin is a great temptation to most people as it is an expression of the very deepest part of our nature and appetites. It is such a powerful driving force.

There is often the thought that we can dabble with these things and escape unscathed. That is not the case. There have been many whose lives have been shattered by succumbing to these temptations. The world has brought in the whole "sexual revolution" in a big way and I would suggest it is having to pay the price for that licence. 1 Corinthians 6:18 enjoins us to flee from such things.

It is about control of our lives, of our minds, and of our desires.

Social sins deal with relationships and attitudes to other people. These are typified in such dispositions as: anger, malice, rage etc.

These things are of the old order. They belong naturally to the old life, to the old self. But that old self should have been 'taken off', declared 'out of use'.

In contrast, there is a renewing process that should be going on in your lives, one of growth and maturing, bringing you to be more like Jesus.

The key to it all is that *'Christ is all and is in all'*. It is all about Jesus living His life out in us.

We look at that in our next passage.