

## **12. Hearts Set on Things Above in Everything—Colossians 3:1-17**

Colossians 2 finished with the statement that the Colossians had died with Christ; and when they died with Christ, they died to the rudiments and principles of the world. All of these things were of no value in restraining the sensual indulgences of the body. Thus, the chapter ends, echoing the teaching of Col 2:8:

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

The corollary to dying with Christ is that they were also raised with Christ. This becomes the idea from which chapter 3 begins. This contrast of dying to the world and being raised with Christ continues through to the end of the chapter. Paul's exhortations here are similar to those found in Ephesians 4 and 5.

### ***Set Your Hearts on Things Above***

Col 3:1-4

*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. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Christians die with Christ when they are buried with him in baptism, and raised to walk in this new life. Paul explains the process in Rom 6:3-7:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Having been raised with Christ, having crucified the old man, and having departed from a life of sin, Christians are now encouraged to set their hearts on things above. Here, Christ is seated at the right hand of God; therefore, Christians must set their minds on the things above where Christ is, and not on earthly things. The real and symbolic power of this transformation is in baptism, where Christians put on Christ and wear him as one might wear a robe. Gal 3:26-27: "26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Once we are clothed in Christ and hide our lives in Christ, Christ becomes our life; and we will appear with him in glory when he comes again.

### ***Put to Death Whatever Belongs to Your Earthly Nature***

Col 3:5-11

*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. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 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.*

Those who have put on Christ must put to death whatever belongs to their earthly nature. He lists these sins of the flesh: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which he calls idolatry. The teachings of Christ forbid these practices among Christians. Paul's reason is that the wrath of God is coming, and these same practices are in those passages that describe his wrath at the last day. Two examples, which describe God's wrath at the last day, are Rev 21:6-8 and 2 Thess 1:6-10. Rev 21:6-8 depicts the last day and the fate of those who practice these worldly deeds:

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

2 Thess 1:6-10 describes how it is the very Lord that we serve who will render vengeance on those who obey not the gospel and know not God:

He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

Not only does Paul condemn those broad practices of evil among men: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, etc., but he condemns those personal habits that come from within ourselves, spewing forth evil from our hearts and minds: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language. Christians will not do these because Christ renewed them in the spirit, and in their minds is the image of God, the Creator, and Jesus Christ, the Lord. Whatever the origin of Christians: bond or free, Jew or Greek, male or female, they are all one in Christ Jesus. Paul's emphatic conclusion to this paragraph states firmly, "Christ is all, and is in all."

### **As God's Chosen People, Clothe Yourselves**

Col 3:12-14

*12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

The idea of clothing ourselves in Christ gains real meaning when we understand that there are characteristics of Christ that we must live out in our daily lives. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience are those characteristics named by Paul as the fruits of the spirit in Gal 5:22-25:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

These are the same characteristics that we see in Jesus as the manifestation of God in him. In John 14:9-10, John reported Jesus commented that when we see him, we have seen the Father:

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the

Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Of course, what they saw, looking at Christ, were the characteristics of goodness inherent in God the Father. Similarly, when people look at Christians today, who are adorned with his spirit, they should see Christ.

In addition to the fruits of the spirit, Christians must be extremely careful how they treat one another. In this passage, the forgiveness of others and the bearing of burdens of others are central to living the Christian life. Paul uses the terms *bear with each other* and *forgive each other*. Gal 6:1-3 tells us that we should carry each other's burdens:

6 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

1 John 5:16-17 takes this principle one step further, where John tells us to pray for those who sin a sin not unto death:

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

Of course, beyond these virtues, it is love that binds Christians together and love that leads us to unity. Paul had written to the Ephesians in Eph 4:2-3 saying: "2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

### ***Let the Peace of Christ Rule in Your Hearts***

Col 3:15-17

*15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

The bond of peace and Ephesians 4: 3 is the peace of Christ that rules in our hearts. Members of the church, the one body, have this peace as part of their heavenly calling. How thankful we should be. Parallel to "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" is the equally forceful saying, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." The practical application of these rich statements requires us to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. The clause *as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom* is parallel to the clause *as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God*. These two principles secure our Christian worship in truth and in act.

Other forms of worship that are generated from the ideas and teaching of man have already been prohibited in chapter 2. Additional acts not specified by the word of the Lord demonstrate that his word is not dwelling in us. Thus, Paul concludes by saying that whatever we do in word or deed, we must do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. In the name of the Lord signifies that it is by the authority of the Lord that we do everything. There can be no other name in work or worship. Indeed, our very salvation depends on the name of the Lord. Peter affirmed this principle in Acts 4:12: "12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

**Study Questions from the Scriptures**

1. Col 2:8: For what should we watch out? On what do hollow and deceptive philosophies depend?
2. Col 3:1-4: Where are we to set our heart? Where is our life now hidden?
3. Rom 6:3-7: Into what were we baptized? What kind of life do we live? What happened to the old self?
4. Gal 3:26-28: How are we clothed in Christ? When we are clothed in Christ, where is our life?
5. Col 3:5-11: What are we to put to death? What things belong to our earthly nature? What things are we to get rid of? In what are we renewed? What people are excluded from the gospel of Christ?
6. Rev 21:6-8: What kind of people will be excluded from heaven? Where will their place be?
7. 2 Thess 1:6-10: Who will come with Jesus? What will happen to those who know about God and obey not the gospel?
8. Col 3:12-14: With what are Christians to clothe themselves? How are Christians to treat one another? What virtue is above other virtues? To what does this virtue lead?
9. Gal 5:22-25: What is the fruit of the Spirit? When we belong to Jesus, what do we crucify?
10. John 14:9-10: When we see Christ, who else do we see? When the world sees us, who else do they see?
11. Gal 6:1-3: When someone is caught in a sin, what are we to do? What fulfills the law of Christ?
12. 1 John 5:16-17: What are we to do when we see a brother sin a sin not unto sin?
13. Eph 4:2-3: How are we to bear with one another? What two things are Christians to make every effort to keep?
14. Col 3:15-17: What are Christians to allow to rule in their hearts? What should dwell in us richly? With what should we teach and admonish one another? What are we to sing? In whose name are we to do all things?
15. Acts 4:12: In whose name is salvation found?