

Paul's Letter to the Colossians
Week 3
Colossians 2:13-3:4

Day One

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

v. 13 – I wasn't just struggling with life before I met Jesus. I was dead! My lifestyle was dead, my thoughts were dead and my actions were, you guessed it, dead. **If one is dead, what is the one thing needed?** It's life! Now most dead things don't have any hope of life, but we do but only in Christ. What's more, we have life now and are promised life even after we die! Thus we live in the hope of the resurrection every day, for death is no longer our final destination – it is life!

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

Are you living in the power and truth of the resurrection every day? What evidence is there that you are?

v. 14 – God forgave us all our sins! If that doesn't make you shout, "Hallelujah", you had better ask why not. What's more, He forgives us our sins on an ongoing basis. That is certainly good news, for I need not just a one-in-a-lifetime Redeemer, but a daily Redeemer. Jesus did, however, cancel the sentence of death that was against me once-and-for-all. **How did He do this?** He did it by nailing the sentence with Him on the cross. That truth makes me think of Isaac Watt's classic hymn, *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*:

When I survey the wondrous cross

*On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;
Then I am dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Day Two

15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. 16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

v. 15 – I don't fully understand what Jesus did behind the scenes through His death. He disarmed demonic forces that had arrayed against me. Don't misunderstand, I appreciate and worship the Lord Jesus for what He did, for there is certainly no way I could have done that for myself. I am simply saying that I cannot fathom either the forces against me or the power of the cross in defeating them.

What's more, Jesus made a public spectacle of them through the cross. Jesus did what He did publicly, for all to behold. He did not obtain our victory in secret or exclusively in the spirit world, where no one would have beheld what He did. No, He did it all publicly and He was shown to be magnificent in and through it all. I am free because of Christ and His suffering on the cross.

v. 16 – Given that fact, Paul did not want anyone to evaluate the Colossians based on a religious scorecard. That scorecard or checklist would include things that were central to

the Law and other religious systems. That list included the duty to celebrate and observe dietary restrictions, religious holidays, feasts, and even a Sabbath day. These kinds of activities are attractive to religious people, for they give them the sense that they are serving God and gaining His approval. For the believer, however, all benefit and religious service is in Christ. The spiritual person may still observe those days and festivals, but that person does it from religious freedom and not bondage and duty.

There were many in the Old Testament who observed certain religious duty, but their focus was always on God. They somehow understood that their salvation came from God and not from the exercise of religious calisthenics. **Do you have the same focus? Do you have a firm grasp that your favor with God is not from what you do, but rather from whom you know – and that is Jesus?**

v. 17 – All the things Paul mentioned – food, festivals and special days – were types, shadows of the reality that was to come in Christ. Many of the things in the Old Testament were types, mostly of Christ but also such things as baptism. The types are a wonderful way that God has tied the two Testaments together, the Old pointing to the New and the New explaining the Old. It is critical to understand, however, that the entire Old Testament system was leading the people to salvation in Christ. There is no room today for devotion to anything that was a type of Christ because the fullness of Christ has come.

This is why I cannot understand anyone who is infatuated with Jewish religious things, like Sabbath-keeping, the rebuilding of the Temple, holy days, or terminology that smacks of a high-priestly system or “sacrifices.” Even churches that have an altar strike me as strange. **Do you agree with me or not? Am I being too legalistic against legalistic symbols?**

Day Three

18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

v. 18 – Paul used the phrase “false humility.” I see this kind of humility all the time. When you do something that God has gifted you to do, but deny that you can do it or think it isn’t very good, that’s false humility. When you have an answer for everything, when God speaks to you incessantly, which in turn causes you to know better than anyone else around you, that is false humility (it’s really pride). When you try to be “nicer than God,” and have patience for things that God has no patience for (like child abuse, leaders who abuse power and financial abuse in spiritual settings), then you are exercising false humility. **Can you think of any instance where you are applying false humility in your life right now?**

I recently met with a young woman who had a telephone line to God, or so it seemed. She had insights and revelations on everything and anything. Please don't get me wrong; I believe that God speaks to people. Well, at least I know He speaks to me. Yet He doesn't speak to me about everything every day.

At an even deeper and more serious level are those who claim that an angel has spoken to them, which has actually launched whole movements (like the Mormons). I am not much "into" angels. I don't see them, pray to them, pray for their protection or give them much attention at all. I know they exist, I know they do God's bidding, but I leave their direction and administration to God.

It is interesting that Paul noted such so-called spiritual people are really unspiritual. They are puffed up with idle notions and try to disqualify others from obtaining the prize, which of course is pure devotion to Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. Why do I need to resort to angelic help when I have the blood of Jesus protecting me at all times? **Why do I need God speaking to me at all times when I have His word and His presence to guide and watch over me?**

The Word directs me to Jesus in everything, for everything and in every way. I don't need any shadow of what was to come, for what was to come has come! Jesus is here!

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs (Hebrews 1:1-4).

v. 19 – Here is the problem with super-spiritual people who talk about angels and the like. They have lost their connection to the Head, who is Jesus. It is all about Jesus! Anything that diminishes or detracts from the role that Jesus has in the Church or in your life is not of God, no matter how spiritual it sounds or feels – that is the lesson that Paul was trying to impart here.

The Body grows as it adheres to the Head and holds together by its ligaments and sinews. **I wonder what the ligaments represent in this analogy?** Perhaps they represent the relationships in the body between believers, but I could be wrong. No Christian can exist in isolation for long. When they do, no matter who they are, they are subject to error or at least a false humility, which causes them to think, "I can do it all by myself." **Do you have that attitude?** If so, you are guilty of wrong thinking. **How do you know whether or not you think like that?** You will know by the relationships or lack thereof, you have with other believers.

Day Four

20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?

v. 20 – You died with Christ. You were buried with Him in baptism so the rules that applied to your life before you died are no longer applicable. You owe your life to Christ, so you owe Him absolute allegiance and obedience. I don't know why, but this makes me think of another song, this time from an anonymous composer:

*I'm not my own, I belong to Jesus
Purchased of God, I'm all His
Bought with a price – the blood of Jesus –
I'm not my own, I'm His.*

It sounds spiritual to have a lot of religious rules, like when I was growing up. We couldn't eat certain things on certain days. We had a lot of rules and it gave one a sense of comfort that one could know what God wanted and didn't want. It made it easy. Yet when I gave my life to Jesus, I died to those rules! Now, there are times when I fast and times when I attend church services. I give gifts to the poor and honor leaders as sent from God. Yet I do these things according to the Lordship of Jesus under the leadership of the Holy Spirit – not trying to earn God's favor or rigidly adhering to those values in a structured, legalistic manner.

I hear this kind of teaching, even where giving is concerned. The latest is a teaching on first fruits, which was a practice in the Old Testament concerning the donation of the first portion of the harvest to God. The first fruits, the last fruits and all the fruits in between belong to God. He can ask you to give any of them at any time. The tithe has also become a legalistic tenet for many. If you don't tithe, some teach that bad things will happen to you. I believe that good things will happen to you when you give generously. I am not sure that the people of Jesus are under any curse if they don't give ten percent of their revenue to Him. **What do you think?**

v. 21 – I was in a Catholic seminary for five years and only left because of the celibacy issue. I knew I wanted to get married. The rule that Catholic clergy cannot marry is a spiritual-sounding rule – you are married to the Lord and His church, or so they say. Yet it is unrealistic, for you can only stay single if you have the grace to stay single. I realize Paul taught that it is preferable to stay single for certain reasons, yet he did not impose this rule on people. He realized that it took a special grace to do so.

This celibacy rule is typical of the rules to which Paul was referring. **How about the Pentecostal rules, not in affect as much as before, that a woman could not wear jewelry, makeup or what we call pants suits (the British would call them trousers, not pants)? And how about the Presbyterian rule that you cannot preach without wearing a black robe? Why all the rules?** They seem to give some comfort that there are procedures to follow where the things of God are concerned?

Where are you in bondage to rules, rules that don't contribute or strengthen your relationship with Jesus? Where are you doing things because you have to do them instead of choosing and wanting to do them? Why do you think you are under such pressure to keep those rules? Where did the pressure come from, and how can you relieve the pressure to perform?

Day Five

22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

v. 22 – Paul had great insight! Of course, he did, for he was inspired by the Spirit to write these words. At the end of the day (or the end of our lives), the only thing that will remain is my relationship with Jesus. My church affiliation will pass, my pet doctrines and preferences will pass, my titles will pass, my religious practices won't matter much and my personal preferences will fade in the light of His presence. **So if those things will pass, why would I invest any time or energy in them now?**

When I was a pastor, I always said that a funeral always served to put things in perspective. It was then that we saw exactly how meaningless much to which we attached meaning really had. **Do you think there our denominations will mean anything in the presence of Jesus? Does He have a ledger that shows how much money you gave you to your church? Will He have a ribbon to give you to reward you for what you wore or didn't wear, what you watched or didn't watch, what you attended or didn't attend?**

You will be judged on one thing and one thing only: whether or not your name is in the book of life. And you get your name in the book of life by putting your faith and hope in Jesus! There is no other way to gain eternal life but by faith in Him. If you want to dress a certain way, or not wear jewelry, or not eat meat on a certain day, that's fine. Just know that you will do those things because you want to and not because they have any spiritual value in and of themselves.

v. 23 – I have read that Muslim women must dress modestly, yet that does not constrain lust in Muslim men! While this has the sound of wisdom – “women must dress modestly” – it does nothing to deal with heart issues of sensual indulgence. Praying three or five times a day facing east sounds spiritual, but one can have hate in his or her heart while doing so, whether a so-called Christian or Muslim. A pilgrimage to a holy site sounds like a spiritual thing to do, but it is meaningless since that site will pass away.

There are Hindus who walk through the streets, beating themselves with sticks and whips to subdue the flesh. This has the semblance of humility, but it is false humility. I went to a South American city and saw where people climbed up a long hillside on their knees to worship at an idol-filled church and there are many who make it their lifelong dream to

do that, and some who do it every year. There are some who participate in Lenten fasts and special services. Yet all of it – that’s right, all of it – is foolishness and contributes nothing to the worship of God, nor does it lead the practitioners to Christ.

Can you think of any other such practices that you have observed, perhaps even in your own church? In your own culture? What is your response to those practices? Do you participate? Why or why not?

Day Six

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.

3:1-2 – Remember, you haven’t only died with Christ. You have been raised to newness of life! That is why I was never a proponent of the crucifix; crosses, yes, but the crucifix, no. **Why is that?** It is because the crucifix never seemed to move beyond the morbid reality of the cross. While that is what earned my salvation, it is not what enriches and gives my salvation its fullest meaning. That belongs to the resurrection, for Jesus saved me from death and delivered me to everlasting life. Hallelujah!

Because I have been raised with Christ, I can and should set my mind on the things that matter for eternity, not for things that will pass away, no matter how spiritual they seem. While the Church debates minor things, the major one seems to escape our notice. **What is the major thing?**

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

We must devote ourselves to things of eternal significance and not to silly, petty arguments over child baptism, speaking in tongues and church government structures. If you get angry at that last statement, then perhaps you don’t see the minor things as minor but want to make them major (when they are not). Another big issue is the doctrine of the end times, all of which is pure conjecture on everyone’s part, for there isn’t enough Scripture to justify any position. Yet we act like we know it all and go to battle against anyone who disagrees.

What are the matters of heaven upon which we should set out minds? I think Mother Teresa had one of them right, when she operated in all she did from love and that love touched the world! In fact, I think Paul referred to this in his letter to the Corinthians:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

What is your heavenly agenda? **Is it uselessly debating marginally-important doctrines or the conversion of the lost? Is it extending God's kingdom or promoting your own denominational club? Do you think Jesus is going to discuss with you the doctrine of His return when you see Him or whether or not you took care of the poor? Will He commend you for your giving of "first fruits" or your service to others where you received no recognition or reward?**

Day Seven

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.

v. 3 – When I examine this verse, it states that my life is hidden in Christ. That means for something to get *to* me it must get *through* Him first. This also means that God is truly in control of all things in my life. For example, if I am not recognized for something I did, it's because Jesus didn't tell anyone about it. He chose to keep my life hidden in Him when I would have preferred that He broadcast it far and wide. If my finances are lean, it is because He has stopped all passage of resources to me in order to develop some other part of my life and being.

This also means that when my enemy comes looking for me, he may not find me because I am well hidden from accusation, guilt and disease. If I am overlooked for a promotion, it is because Jesus didn't tell anyone where I was. **How else can you think to apply this truth in your own life? Is it a source of comfort or consternation that your life is hidden?**

v. 4 – We will not realize the significance of some saints until the Lord returns. He hid their role and good deeds and they won't all be fully known until He returns. That is God's choice – to some He gives honor and some He gives dishonor. Some receive public notoriety and others do not. **Can you make peace with this fact?**

God has the right to treat you however He chooses. In the Matthew study, we saw this truth:

“Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town” (Matthew 23:34).

Jesus knew He was sending some of His servants where they would be abused and rejected – and sent them anyway! In the case of James, his life was claimed early in the life of the Church, yet James had been one of Jesus' closest associates.

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:1-3).

The Lord had James killed, but Peter was only seized and not killed. In Revelation, we also see the martyrs who cry out for justice and the Lord tells them not now, not yet:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Revelation 6:9-10).

I hope you get the picture that you have truly died and are hidden in Christ. He will therefore treat you as He sees fit according to His perfect plan. Yet He loves you and died for you, which gives Him the sovereign right to do so.