

Colossians 3 The Place of God

Key verses so far are:

1:9 Filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

1:15 He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God [Jesus Christ makes God visible].

1:24 [I] fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

1:27 which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

2:3 In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit.

2:9 For in [Christ] all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.

2:10 For you are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power.

2:17 the substance is of Christ.

The Place of God.

There is a place we can go in God. Jesus had no place where He could lay His head (Mtt 8:20) but He definitely had a place in God where He could go (Mtt 14:13). Jesus spoke of the secret place where we can go when fasting, praying and alms giving (Mtt 6:4, 6, 18). It is there where our Father, who sees in secret, will reward us openly. Paul is claiming that we have a place in Christ which is with Him in the heavenlies, now.

3:1 If therefore you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Paul here follows the theme of baptism raised in 2:12. Through baptism we have died with Christ to the elemental forces (influences, spirits) of the universe and, as we are raised out of the water of baptism, we rise to a new life in Christ. By baptism we are baptised into Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-4). This is an interpretation of what has already happened to us. We are already in that place of resurrection which is newness of life. Paul says that as he is conformed to the dying of Christ he will be conformed to the rising of Christ (Phil 3:10-11). He shares the afflictions of Christ that he might share the glory of Christ: he is a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20-21; Heb 13:14). Our place is seated with Christ in the heavenly realm. This is a spirit reality, now. It is a place we can and should go, now. The world cannot take this from us; the world can only hasten us towards it.

3:2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Things above are in the third heaven (2Cor 12:1-4) where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. This is our place in God. There we are established in the ultimate justice, truth and glory of God. This is the beatific vision. This is the pull of the ultimate. There is a place of perfection about which we should meditate. Don't set your mind on the corruption and disaster we see in this world but set your mind (meditate) on heavenly perfection and salvation in Christ. Some say this makes us too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. Paul is saying that we can be too earthly minded to be of any heavenly use. Heaven is our goal in God's time. What does this mean about our attitude to injustice in the world? Many are motivated by injustice. The Radical sees injustice as a power struggle and they deliberately set about to change the power structure by such methods as consciousness-raising, street demonstration and other deliberately orchestrated confrontations with the ruling power structure ('elite'). There is a whole language and litany associated with civil unrest. In the presence

of injustice (which does exist) we first establish our mind in the justice of God. We see that there is a place of total justice, in heaven. This is the motivating vision and anchor for our souls. I must be established in the righteousness of God rather than my own vision for justice. God will ultimately rid the world of injustice and only He can do it. Our Christian conscience is to stand for the righteousness of God not the accommodation and justice-thinking of men. Freedom in Christ is not freedom to do anything but freedom to behave before God and for the glory of His kingdom. The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Our behaviour in the world must always be oriented to our meditation on (in) heaven. (Consider Paul's letter to Philemon about the slave Onesimus who, though still a slave, was to be treated as a brother in Christ. The issue is Christian conscience and social structures. The power belongs to God. Do you change the power structure or the value of the person? The value of the person comes from God not the power structure.)

3:3-4 For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Paul is saying that the Christian is dead to the world (Gal 6:14) but alive to God. The ultimate protection is to have your life hidden with Christ in God. Paul can have all kinds of negative experiences in the world (1Cor 4:10-13; 2Cor 6:4-10) but he knows that he is secure in Christ. This conforming to the life and experience of Christ (Phil 3:21) means that as we die with Him we will also live with Him, who is the Judge of all (Mtt 25:31-46).

3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and covetousness which is idolatry.

A member is originally a limb (arms, legs, hands, eyes Mtt 5:29-30), an extension of the body or how the body extends itself. Here Paul treats earthly members as sinful behaviours. Our behaviour is how we extend ourselves in the world. These members (person projections) are to be put to death: fornication (sexual intercourse outside of marriage). Fornication usually tops the lists of sins in the NT (Mtt 15:19; Mk 7:21; Rom 1:29; 2Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1Thess 4:3; Rev 21:8). Fornication is the fast way to destroy your life. Then come uncleanness (impurity, pornographic mind, lewdness), passion (strong sensual desire, lust, raging), evil desire (strongly desiring what is evil) and covetousness (selfish greed). To covet is to want what someone else has (money, power, ability, celebrity). Covetousness is a form of idolatry. We are idolising the other. These behaviours are to be put to death. They cannot be part of the Christian life. It is a contradiction for the Christian to behave like this.

3:6-7 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

God will judge these behaviours (as in Rev 21:8). However, God is already judging these behaviours by handing people who do them over to the consequences of their behaviour (Rom 1:24, 26, 28). The wrath of God is the righteousness anger of a holy God. He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor (Lk 3:17). The sons of disobedience are the progeny of rebellion (Jn 8:44; Eph 2:2; 5:6) in which we all at some time walked.

3:8 But now you also are to put off all these things: anger, rage, malice, slander, foul language from your mouth.

These are all sins of the mouth (speech): indignation, hostility, invoking evil, character assassination, swearing and obscenity.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. We speak out of our internal treasure. By our words we will be either justified or condemned (Mtt 12:33-37).

3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.

The deep source of deception is the old nature (the old man, personality, identity). This old nature can be simply put off. It is a choice. Abiding by that choice may require endurance and the re-construction of another way of living, but it is possible. It does not require a long apprenticeship to put off the 'old man'.

3:10 and you have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

The new man (nature, identity) that we put on in Christ is renewed in its capacity to know. It learns different things. This is not a random knowledge but it is an image-knowledge according to the information given by the image of the Creator Himself. We will be like Him, in conformity to His body (Phil 3:21).

3:11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all in all.

There are four basic human categories represented here. These are divisions or distinctions created between human beings by human beings. The first division is between Jew and Gentile: this is a racial distinction. The second division is between circumcised and uncircumcised: this is a religious distinction. The third division is between barbarian (Greek non-speaking and therefore illiterate) and primitive: this is a cultural distinction. The fourth distinction is between slave and free: this is an economic distinction. Whatever the distinction that human beings create to judge one another, Jesus Christ overrules it. The distinction may still be there but it has no consequence in Christ. God's grace is extended to all. The distinctions may still be there but what the distinction is supposed to imply with respect to person-worth does not apply in Christ.

3:12 Therefore as chosen ones of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering,

The Roman world was a brutal world. The Christian is to be moved by 'bowels' of compassion (a reservoir of compassionate feelings), a sincerely good and kind heart, a humility that comes out of regard for the other not out of self denigration (Col 2:23), a meekness that comes from a genuine estimate of our own ability and the capacity to endure and suffer long into the event.

3:13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; you should forgive even as the Lord forgave you.

Forgiveness is essential in this process. We must forgive if we have anything against anyone (Mk 11:25). We love because the Lord first loved us (1John 4:19). We must forgive if we want God to forgive us (Mtt 6:15, 18:35; Mk 11:26).

3:14 But above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfection.

The overarching behaviour of the Christian is love. Love pulls everything together. Love is the bond of completion and fullness. Nothing can outgrow love. Love is the virtue that cultivates and restores all other virtues. Love is the greatest extent to which a Christian can go. Nothing outgoes love.

3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in the one body; and be thankful.

The Greek word translated 'rule' here is the word to umpire or arbitrate (in a competition) as to which comes first, second or

third. This metaphor from the Greek (Olympic) games means that the peace of God decides what comes first (or last) in our life. There are many forces, interests, images and goals competing for our attention and performance. Paul is asking 'What do you have a peace about?' Peace is a spirit experience and a contentment in God (1Tim 6:6). Peace is not just the cessation of hostilities. Peace is the gift of God. Jesus Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14). God gives his beloved sleep (Ps 127:2). Being thankful is a spirit discipline. Let the gift of the peace of God rule in your heart.

3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Jesus Christ Himself is the Word (Logos) and He dwells in us by means of the Word. Jesus Christ does not dwell by emotion or feeling or experience but by the Word. We may have experiences or feelings as a result of the presence of the Word of God in us, but the cause is the Word. Jesus says that His words are to abide in us (Jn 15:8). Peter says that we are born again of the incorruptible seed of the word of God which lives and abides forever (1Pet 1:23). Christians sing and part of the riches of the indwelling Word is the desire to sing. Singing hymns is a form of teaching and admonishing (reminding, correcting) one another of the things of God. Singing hymns is a subversive activity.

3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Teach me, my God and King
In all things Thee to see
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.

(George Herbert)