

COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 3:1-11 (b)

Lesson #13

Introduction

Last week we moved into chapter 3 in our study of the book of Colossians. We've titled this study the life of the new man, and we discussed verse one. The emphasis of the first few verses in chapter 3 seems to be the mindset of the believers and the focus of their attention and their hopes and their expectations. It's a call to the believers to set their minds on the things that are above, the things that are not seen, because that's where the believer's lives really reside.

We'll resume our study at verses 2 through 5 in this lesson, but let's read the entire group, verses 1 through 11, so we capture the proper context of the thought:

The Life of the New Man

1 So if you have been raised with the Messiah, seek what is above, where the Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God. 4 When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

5 Therefore, put to death whatever in you is worldly: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God's wrath comes on the disobedient, 7 and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. 8 But now you must also put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his practices 10 and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

Col 3:1-11 (HCSB)

Verses 2 & 3:

2 Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God.

This is a wonderful and encouraging verse. We find comfort in it when things aren't going so well for us, because we believe that what's really important, in the long run, isn't what's going on here and now, but what's eventually to come at the glorious return of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Tit 2:13)

But I'll be among the first to admit that this isn't as easy as it sounds. No matter how genuinely we believe, nevertheless the coming kingdom is an unseen kingdom to us. For now, we live in a visible world that has immediate and sometimes dire consequences, both for us and for our loved ones. So it's essential that we are continually being reminded, by way of the study of the scriptures and the assembly together for prayer and worship, so we can keep our focus on the things that aren't seen rather than the earthly things that are. Remember Paul's words to the Corinthians:

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Cor 4:16-18 (NASB)

And again, to the Roman church he said:

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

Romans 8:18-19 (NASB)

Keeping our minds set on the things that are above, and understanding that the essential sin nature of our old self has died with Christ, and now our new life is hidden from view through our incorporation into the body of Christ, is a mystery that we take by faith in the word and works of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. But by no means is this a blind faith. Because, just as the works of Jesus Christ testified to His claims, likewise, the new lives and affections of His redeemed also testify to their claims of sonship to God the Father. Remember Christ's words:

"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38 but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I [am] in the Father."

John 10:37-38 (NASB)

Jesus himself said that if the works being done don't match the words being said then the person shouldn't be believed, even Himself included. This clearly refutes any claims that Christians aren't any different from others in their actions, they're just forgiven for them. We've heard that erroneous theory before haven't we? Propagated no doubt by those who truly aren't any different, and seek some kind of justification for the absence of any sanctifying work going on in their lives. If there's no sanctifying work going on, then there's no saving faith and indwelling Spirit present, as we'll get to in greater depth starting in verse 5. But for now, on to verse four:

Verse 4:

4 When [Christ] the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

The glorious return of Jesus Christ (Rev 19) is His vindication and glorification, and it's also the revealing of the true chosen and elect sons of God. The wheat will finally have been thoroughly separated from the tares, and the true kingdom of God is manifested before every living creature. Is this not worth seeking after above all else, and at the expense of everything? Is Christ not our pearl of great price, for which we gladly sell all that we have to obtain?

Furthermore, He is said to be "our life." What does this mean? In the same way that verse 3 said that we have died, when we don't see ourselves as dead; likewise verse 4 says that He is our life, when we think we're already alive by ourselves. The life and death being spoken of here isn't this mortal flesh and blood life that we can see and touch. The life and death being spoken of here is that life and death that pertains to our invisible internal essence of being. It is our ontological existence that transcends the earthly and tangible realm. For us to be raised with Christ, then we must first also have died with Him, since nobody can be said to have been resurrected if they haven't ever died.

With our fleshly eyes we can't see the death that we died (v.3), nor can we see the new life we've received, but both are more real and lasting than the fleshly ones that we can see. We're told that flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God, (1Co 15:50) so there must be something substantial about us that's not visible and carnal, but is nevertheless eternal. So then, how do we know that it's real? The same way Jesus said, we look at the effects that it produces. Which brings us to verse five.

Verse 5:

5 Therefore, put to death whatever in you is worldly: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.

This is a representative list, not an exhaustive list. Elsewhere in scriptures there are many other things mentioned that are to be included in the list of behavioral imperatives for the children of God. We will not find a single one of these in the life and works of Jesus Christ. And likewise, we shouldn't find any of these in the regular daily lives of His true believers either.

But nonetheless, because of our weakness, and the relentless war of the flesh, we do find them making occasional intrusions into our thoughts and actions don't we? If in fact we have died with Christ, then why do we still occasionally fall victim to these temptations? And if we've been raised with Christ, then why haven't we risen above the lure of these things? Was our death and resurrection with Christ less than 100 percent effectual? How are we to understand the many references to having died, and being a new creation, when we know that in ourselves we still haven't totally escaped the old realm? How do we reconcile the absolute language of the scriptures with what we know to be the actual situation in our own hearts?

The answer to this dilemma lies with our inability to make the clear distinction between that which is Spirit and that which is flesh. As we said before, these verses are referring to that portion of the human creature that's dealing with the very essence of our being. This is often called our spirit, or our soul. It's the intangible, invisible, essence of our being. But we tend to evaluate everything by what's visible and tangible, namely our flesh.

Nowhere does the scripture suggest that this part of our being that's flesh will ever be transformed or reformed. Rather it's said that it must eventually die. Paul told the Corinthians to hand over one of the members of their church who was openly sinning to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit might be saved. There is no hope of saving or reforming this flesh in which we reside. It was from the beginning placed under the curse of death by God Himself.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not for one second saying that this relieves us of responsibility for our actions. It just means that our flesh will forever, as long as we're alive and residing in these fleshly bodies, continually try to lure us into temptations. But we are commanded to resist these urges to the best of our ability and put these things to death every day by the power of the new life we've received. Make no mistake, until the Lord calls us to be with Him in His presence, we are engaged in a lifelong war with our very own flesh and blood bodies in which we reside:

To understand this we must understand that sin also resides in these flesh bodies that we inhabit. Yes, our spirit has been reborn, but our flesh still has to be put to death. We share a tangible body that contains both our new regenerated spirit and a sin nature that's not going to repent or reform itself. Paul explains this with marvelous clarity in Romans chapter seven, where he declares that he has come to the realization that this thing called sin actually lives inside of him and it has a mind and will all of its own. Hence the warfare. So what is our weapon and means of defense? How do we put to death whatever in us is worldly, as verse 5 says? Galatians 5 gives us some help:

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Gal 5:16-18 (NASB)

Okay, we're supposed to walk, that's behave and conduct ourselves according to the leading of our new regenerated spirit, but is that enough to overcome the temptations of this indwelling sin nature? We get some more help now from Romans 6:

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you [formerly] presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Romans 6:15-19 (NASB)

I was in an early church that taught that this happens entirely apart from our direct and intentional volition. That the obedience spoken of here was attained by some kind of ethereal mental state where a person somehow turns off all his conscious faculties and surrenders them the Spirit who then just does all the right things in us. This is nothing more than antinomianism disguising itself as spiritual enlightenment. It didn't work, but there are some still trying to this very day.

On the contrary, all the verses of scripture tell us repeatedly that what we've received is a reborn spirit that does its work through our human faculties, of knowledge, reason, and understanding. Putting to death the things that are worldly is a task that our Father has commanded us, His children to do. And He has provided the tools and weapons with which we are to implement this task.

But, His ultimate intention for this warfare that He's dropped us into is very easy to miss. Was it His intention that we would gain perfect victory over the temptations of our flesh, and put it forever to death, before we can pass on to take our place in His eternal kingdom? The scripture preclude this by Romans 7 and 1 John 1:8 and many places elsewhere. So just exactly why has God left us encapsulated in a body that's unredeemable after regenerating our spirit? Why would

He do that? Then He commands us to be perfect as He is perfect. (Mat 5:48) Is it possible that He actually believes that we can do that? While God's thoughts are above our thoughts, and His ways are far above our ways, nevertheless He has decided to reveal many things to us if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

It would be shortsighted to think that God doesn't really know how impossible it is for us to be perfect as He is perfect, as long as we're living in a fallen container and still bonded somehow to that flesh of death. No, He surely has a purpose for this situation, and it isn't because He had a better intention for us in the beginning but Satan ruined it all.

It's sad how many actually believe this, that Satan has the power to make God alter His eternal plans. On the contrary, Satan is just another tool in God's toolbox, and he does exactly what God made him to do, nothing more and nothing less. When God's finished with him He's going to casually and altogether quite effortlessly, toss him into that cosmic dumpster called the Lake of Fire.

So then, what is God's purpose for knowingly putting us into this hopeless situation and demanding a standard of performance that He knows we aren't able to achieve? There are two questions that immediately arise here. First there's the question of His authority to do this to us, and then there's the question as to His purpose that He intends for doing it. Let's take these one at a time. First, His authority:

(1) This whole situation causes much controversy. Isn't it unfair of God to demand something from us that He knows we can't do? Doesn't that violate every human concept of fair play? Doesn't God owe it to everyone to have a reasonable and equal chance for success? Well, if God were the president of the United States then yes He would have that obligation to the people he serves. And that's exactly how most of humankind sees God, as some kind of presidential ruler over a kingdom of people who have the same basic rights as He does. We actually see ourselves on the same plain of existence as God Almighty. And weigh His actions and rights on our human scale of justice. We actually believe we can call Him to account for His actions. And this immense loss of perspective is the cause of our many dilemmas with his words and actions.

He is no more like a human president than light is like darkness. He can no more be weighed on a human scale of justice than the cosmos can be weighed on a bathroom scale. We have forfeited our concept of the sovereignty and absolute transcendence of Almighty God. We dare to openly challenge both His motives and His tactics. Many famous professing Christians openly declare that they refuse to serve a cruel and vindictive God who dares to exercise His sovereignty over the "free will" of any of His human creatures. Who does He think He is anyway - God? Oops, that doesn't work does it?

It's because we try to define God within our own human boundaries of measure that we get so many skewed results. He doesn't fit, and cannot be measured or evaluated by anything we know or feel with our fallen carnal faculties. He is the sovereign creator, and moment by moment sustainer, of everything that exists in the entire cosmos. He has the unquestionable right to do whatsoever He will with that which He has created out of nothing. (Rom 9:19-22)

Lets make something very clear right from the onset, **God has never created any equals**, He has created only servants, and slaves, who exist solely to serve His own desires. Oh yes, He loves those servants and slaves, but they are still only servants and slaves, with absolutely no claim to any personal rights, nor much less any authority to question their master's actions. Oh how this chafes against our carnal pride. As it did against another, called Satan, who refused to submit to such humbling servitude, and suffers the repercussions forever. (Example)

We go and buy a dog to be our household pet. When we bring it home we immediately begin to train it to behave as we require to fit our routines. However, if that dog absolutely refuses to submit to our authority, and makes a mess on the floor, and barks all night, and bites our guests, then we simply return that dog to the pound and forget about it. We exercise our absolute sovereignty over that dog and feel no moral obligation whatsoever to explain or justify our actions to it. We are the master, it is the pet. Two whole separate plains of existence are in effect here, and we have no problem with this concept at all.

But, when Almighty God, who is ten trillion times more above us on the plains of existence, exercises His sovereignty over us, we immediately feel violated and misused, and label Him a vindictive tyrant. We're willing and anxious to be the master, but we've totally unwilling to be the pet, the slave, so to speak. Now certainly humans are a higher order of life than animals, but, God has no less authority over humans, than humans have over dogs and cats. Two separate plains of existence are in effect here as well. There are no accountability issues involved in God's use and deployment of His own possessions. Therefore, as to His authority to set standards and make demands upon His creatures, He has absolute and unquestioned authority to do whatsoever He pleases, and whether or not we understand it, or agree with it, simply isn't an issue.

(2) Now having established His authority, let's look at question number 2. Just what might be the reason that He's doing all this, and going through so much time and effort on behalf of His creatures.

Now I want to start by telling you something that I hope will encourage you, but I don't want it to make you careless. And that is that no mortal human being in the history of existence has ever completely subdued the flesh and conquered the allure of sin as God has commanded. The holy scriptures tell us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:23) Therefore, we mustn't ever lose heart and forfeit the prize for fighting the good fight of faith. We will all get wounded occasionally by sin. We will all fall short, but even so, we aren't absolved of the responsibility to obey God, and earnestly seek with all our hearts, and all our minds, and all our strength, to love Him and keep His commandments. Even though we are housed, and contained, within a fallen and cursed body of flesh that impedes our success.

If you don't know what's going on then you'll have a very hard time understanding things. If you think the purpose of life is what happens here and now then you'll feel like life is hopeless and God is unreasonable, and maybe even vindictive. When Jesus was questioned by Pontius Pilate He told him that He was a king, but His kingdom was not of this earthly realm. If it was then it wasn't much of a kingdom was it? No, what happens here and now is the preparation process, whereby each and every one is made ready for that eternal kingdom, just as Jesus himself was.

The things He did on earth established His position of authority over all creation, and likewise, it's what we are subjected to, and endure, and learn, here and now that makes us ready for our places in that same eternal kingdom. Jesus wasn't meant to succeed in establishing an earthly kingdom at that time, and we aren't meant to conquer sin in this lifetime by our own power and force of will. It is the fight with sin, and the knowledge gained by losing it, that is the very intent of God for His elect children. He intends for us to lose and to learn from it. Learn what? Learn the value of perfect righteousness when it's offered, and the only possible source to obtain it.

His ultimate gift of perfect righteousness is only given to those who have been rightly prepared to receive it. This gift is far too great to be squandered on those who don't, or can't, appreciate the value of it. God has gone to a great deal of effort to create an environment (the whole creation) in which to train and educate His elect about Himself, and about the gifts that He's prepared for those who love Him. (1Co 2:9) This is why He's put us into a temporarily unwinnable situation, so that we will finally emerge from it fully educated and prepared to truly see His glory. And, seeing and understanding, we will be prepared as the family of eternal worshipers that He set out to create before the world began.

His kingdom was not of this realm and this age, and our kingdom is not of this realm and this age. This is why we eagerly await His return. Because we cannot win in this realm. We are predestined by God to lose here, just as was His beloved Son, so that by losing here and now, we can win a place there with Him forever. It is by losing that we win, it is by dying that we live, it is by being defeated that we become more than conquerors in the eternal kingdom of our Savior and our God.

This is considered utter nonsense to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God for salvation to all those who believe. Because God was pleased to effect His predestined plan of salvation, and preparation of His elect, through this process of faith and submission to His Son Jesus, which was fully intended to include the open hostility and rejection of the sinful world. Which hostility and rejection only serves to make the elect more hungry and thirsty for that awaiting perfect new body provided by the imputed righteousness of Christ, that will be provided to all of His elect at His glorious return. Come quickly Lord Jesus.

Conclusion:

Consider Jesus Christ, rejected, humiliated, and brutally murdered here on earth, rose again and visibly ascended into heaven to take His place at the right hand of God the Father. Humbled and humiliated on earth, but exalted above everything in the kingdom of God. How clearly we see that God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

In verse one we were told to seek what is above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Then in verse two we're told to set our minds on what's above, not on what's on the earth. In verse three we're told that we have died, and our life is now hidden with Christ in God. We've discussed briefly just what life and death we're discussing. The Scriptures here are talking about a life and death that is spiritual not fleshly and earthly. It's talking about a life that cannot be seen or touched, but nonetheless is more lasting and real than this flesh and blood body that we can see.

Then in verse four it goes on to say; when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then we also will be revealed with Him in glory. Just as the path to glory for Jesus was one of humiliation, and pain, and suffering, likewise didn't He tell us that our path would also be difficult and perilous. It's difficult to understand how so many professing Christians think the Bible teaches prosperity, and health, and wealth, and an easy life, when Christ himself, who is our life and our example, had none of these.

Then in verse five it goes on to say; therefore, put to death what ever in you is worldly. Here we discussed the meaning of putting to death what is worldly, and just exactly how we're supposed to do that. We discussed that putting to death what is worldly is talking about our actions and behaviors being motivated and limited by the influence of the Holy Spirit working through our own faculties of understanding God's commands, and then choosing to obey them rather than following the ever present call of the flesh to sin.

It was at this point that we discussed two issues. The first was God's authority to make demands upon His creatures. And the second was what His purpose is for doing so. We discussed the great controversy that continually arises over the thought that God commands His creatures to do something that He knows they cannot do. In this examination I first discussed God's authority, but in fact, it might be easier for humanity if we first discussed His purpose.

Because for us, it seems easier to accept that which appears unreasonable, if we know there's a good reason for it. I have no problem with teaching it in this order, but make no mistake, whether we understand or whether we don't, God's authority to do as He pleases, remains unchallenged. When we understand God's purpose we find it easier to obey, but let's be very clear, whether we understand or we don't, God's commands stand firm. The simple fact is, we won't always understand God's commands, but nevertheless, we are bound to obey them without questioning either His authority or His purpose for giving them.

And finally, we discussed God's purpose for placing his children in a hopeless situation. Just as He placed his beloved Son in a hopeless situation. That we, just as He, will go through the necessary process to make us ready to take our eternal place by His side in His kingdom. Seeing and fully appreciating the depth of His love, and the magnitude of His glory, and freely worshiping Him, in spirit and in truth, forever and ever, for He seeks ones such as these to be His eternal worshipers. May we ever be among those ones. Amen.