

Col. 3:1-17 –

If then You Were Raised with Christ

1. Let the Preeminence of Christ Captivate your Hearts.
2. Let the Peace of Christ Rule in your Hearts.
3. Let the Word of Christ Dwell in your Hearts Richly.



There was this Christian congregation in Colossae, in Asia Minor, not far from Laodicea, and we don't know too much about them. But from Paul's letter we gather that he had never been there himself, that rather Epaphras, a team member with Paul, had been instrumental in "planting" them as a congregation (1:3-8; 4:12-13), also that Philemon was one of the brothers in fellowship. His was one of the homes where the church gathered (Ph. 2). And then there was Nymphas' home, another meeting place (Col. 4:15).

Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had run away, possibly with some of his boss' money. Then, when Onesimus, somehow, got together with Paul, imprisoned in Rome, he surrendered to the Lord, and was later sent back to Colossae by Paul with a letter of reconciliation for Philemon, which he may have carried himself. He travelled in the company of Tychicus, who carried the letter to the Colossian congregation (4:7-9).

One motivation behind Paul's writing to the Colossians was the infiltration of heresies, particularly of the Gnostic variety. The Gnostics held Christ to be merely one rung on the ladder to full enlightenment. We might compare it to the Muslim's view of Christ, according to which He is no more than one of a long line of prophets, with the great Muhammad himself towering far above them all.

So Paul gives testimony to the reality of the Christ of God, who has the preeminence in all things and in whom all fullness dwells (1:18-19), he opens up "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27), in whom, moreover, "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3); in whom, indeed, "dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily" (2:9).

*Paul shows how, consequently, the hope to, eventually, arrive at full enlightenment by much striving, is a false hope. Christ's follower **has been fully included** in all that Christ has already attained through his cross and resurrection. No one can hope to be "more complete" than Christ. And in Christ the believer **is complete** (2:10)! Paul shows how that glorious reality should now work out in his day-to-day discipleship: "**As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him**" (2:6-7).*

1. Let the Preeminence of Christ Captivate your Hearts

(3:1-7).

A true Christian, born as a member of the “first man”, Adam, has been *reborn* as a member of the “second man”, Christ (1 Cor. 15:45-49). In other words, in Christ he has been raised from Adam’s “death” to LIFE. So Paul says, “If that is the case, then you too are where Christ is, that is, *in Christ* you are now ‘sitting at the right hand of God’” (see Eph. 2:6). That is your real life, so why seek things which are below, on the earth, and let *them* fill your heart and mind?

The Man Christ Jesus is preeminent in ALL of creation (1:13-20). His victory, in which the Christian shares, was complete, which is why He is seated at the right hand of God. Why then should such a Christian go back and be “cheated” “*through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ*” (2:8)?

The Israelites, in their “seeking”, tended to go back to historical points of reference, like Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba. The intention may have been good, but the result was that these places were turned into shrines of idolatry. Seeking is important, but there is no sense in seeking in the wrong direction. So what does God tell them? “*Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the LORD and live...*” (Amos 5:4-6).

It is what happens all too easily to a Christian who allows his heart and mind to slowly empty of Christ Himself. He may get all captivated by history and tradition. The Reformation, or some momentous Revival or movement of the past may take on more meaning than the very Word of God. How easily great men, say Calvin, Wesley, Jonathan Edwards or Spurgeon, even an AW Tozer, T Austin-Sparks, Watchman Nee or CS Lewis, and the things they have said and done, become all but idols to a Christian... And that is saying nothing of so many men, and quite a few women, of the present who have made it a fine art to tie people to themselves and to their ministries... It is a progressive corrosion that robs Christ of his rightful place in the heart. Paul is concerned and he tells his Colossian friends to get their hearts and minds refocused on Christ, and Christ alone, and allow themselves to be truly captivated by HIM and his preeminence.

He goes on to remind them (and us) of the fact that, in Christ, we have actually died! – together with Christ! And that our life now is *hidden* with Christ in God. It is like the treasure a man found in a field and quickly buried again (Mt. 13). Jesus portrays himself like that laborer on the land, who, after finding such treasure, goes and pays the price, however high, to “redeem” that land. When later the moment comes to reveal himself to the whole world as the true and legitimate owner of the field, the one who paid the price of redemption, *He will also produce the treasure* that no one, but himself, realized was there. The treasure will be lifted out to the amazement and admiration of the whole world. Paul says: “*When Christ, our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*”.

In other words, Christ is now hidden to the world, but He should *not* be hidden to his treasured redeemed ones. He *is* preeminent to God, though hidden to the world. Why should He not be absolutely PRE-eminent to each one of us too? God wants to open our eyes more and more to that reality and victory and glory and majesty of the MAN, seated at his right hand. Then, when the present time of being *hidden*, of being a non-entity to the world, has passed, and He *appears*, we shall *also* emerge from obscurity – we shall *appear* with him in glory!

Only as we are into God’s Word, does He reveal more and more of all this to us. We begin to see how in this MAN dwells all the fullness of the GODhead bodily (2:9)! Think of Paul’s testimony in Philippians 3: “*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him..., that I may know Him...*”

2. Let the Peace of Christ Rule in your Hearts (3:8-15).

Why is there so little peace among the followers of the Prince of peace? We know that He “*made peace through the blood of his cross*” (1:20). We also know we “*were called in one body*” (3:15), i.e. as members of the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. Yet what is conveyed to the watching world often looks more like a self-devouring body: “*If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!*” (Gal. 5:15).

From verse 8 on Paul shows the practical consequences of actively looking for Christ in the right place, i.e. at the right hand of the Father, and doing so with our hearts *and* minds. In the body of Christ on earth members hail from all kinds of nations, tribes, languages and backgrounds. In other words, conflicts are bound to erupt all the time!

The answer is not to be found in better organizations or greater ecumenism, or in other efforts of mortal men. The real answer is superbly illustrated in Jesus as He stands at the grave of Lazarus. The stone has just been rolled away, stench is billowing out... (Jn. 11); while Martha and the others, utterly distressed, have their minds on that decomposing corpse..., Jesus speaks of the visible glory of God, and lifts his eyes to heaven!

There is always plenty in and among the members of his family that makes us discover how unworthy of HIM we really are – well may we think of a decomposing corpse. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, brings a lot of that to light in these verses. However, the more we lift our eyes to heaven and become aware of *his* incredible “worthiness”, as it is revealed to us..., the more we long to have that daily incredible **un**worthiness dealt with drastically! The Holy Spirit then takes us back to the Cross of Christ – He simply tells us that we died there *with* him. So, consciously, day by day, by faith, we learn to “put off the old man” and “put on the new man”.

Paul lists seven wonderful traits which the Holy Spirit works in and among God’s children: **1)** tender mercies, **2)** kindness, **3)** humility, **4)** meekness, **5)** longsuffering, **6)** forbearance, **7)** forgiveness. They are the indispensable ingredients of Christian peace. It is like Joseph’s wonderful tunic of beautiful colors – the new coat of the new man, which we are to dress with. It has these seven admirable rainbow colors and at the end there is special mention of the clasp or broche of **love**, which keeps it all perfectly together.

Then he adds: “**Let the peace of God rule in your hearts**”. There are translations that have “peace of Christ”. The Christian, captivated by Christ, will let Christ rule in his heart, in his mind and in his daily life, and that includes the rule of Christ’s *peace* in his heart.

In the world it is conflict that “reigns”, not peace. Even among God’s children, that often holds true. But, just as the Son of David, reigning from his throne in Jerusalem, as He will be very soon, will bring peace to the whole world (Is. 9:6-7), so peace *already* reigns in the life **where He is preeminent now**, where He occupies his throne. His peace reigns not only *in* that Christian, but also *through* him in his relations with brothers and sisters, even when these relationships tend to be subject to any number of human strains. There is humility, forgiveness and all the qualities mentioned, plus love.

No member of “the body of Christ” can experience peace in his relationships with other members of that body, *unless* the peace of Christ reigns in his own heart first, i.e. in his emotions, desires, sensitivities etc. In other words, his heart must not only be *captivated by* Christ, it must also be at peace with Christ, and that means *submitted to* Christ!

Once he can say in truth: “**Not I, but Christ!**” (Gal. 2:20), the believer begins to see and understand his brothers and sisters with the eyes and mind of Christ, and love them with the heart of Christ. Peace reigns in his heart and peace reigns in his relationships. There is no other answer to the manifold problems of dissension and division that assail the body of Christ on earth.

3. Let the Word of Christ Dwell in your Hearts Richly

(3:16-17).

From Ephesians 6 and Hebrews 4 we know that God's Word is the Spirit's sword. It touches hearts and breaks down resistance, and lives are transformed through its power. But, just as every single soldier needs to be trained in order to be able to handle his weapons; so the spiritual soldier with his spiritual sword. The Word of Christ *must* dwell richly in the Christian if he is to be any good on the battlefield!

How clumsy Peter was with his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane. But when he truly submitted to his Lord for training with another sword and for another battlefield, he became a very useful 'soldier'. David, acknowledging his need for training, said: "*Blessed be the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle*" (Ps. 144:1).

Paul speaks to us about Christian ministry: "*in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another*". But just *who* is he saying this to? To "ministers" so-called? To a privileged caste of seminary trained men and (some) women, who, Sunday after Sunday, mount the pulpit and "minister" the Word to the congregation in front of them - in other words, is Paul addressing a "clergy"?

From the words that Peter quoted from the prophet Joel, on the day of Pentecost, we know that every single believer is called to be a "mouthpiece" of the Savior, passing the Word to the world around him. And again in 1 Peter 4 he says: "*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*"

How did we manage to effectively disarm a vast army and browbeat the soldiers into surrendering their weapons and their God-given stewardships to the men who love to be called "Reverend" and "Doctor"? Not only that, how have we failed to understand that by taking any effective ministry of the Word *from* the "ordinary" believer, *from* the "layman and laywoman" so-called, and by considering *them* the routine target of the preaching effort from the pulpit, we have effectively stunted them in their motivation, in their growth and in their "*being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1 P. 2:5)? Isn't it ironic that the very efforts of the men in the pulpit, calculated to "build up" a congregation, are in fact a calculated stratagem from the Enemy to keep millions of Christians in their shocking "hand-to-mouth" existence?

In Colossians 3, Paul mentions the constant and normal ministry of the Word as it is exercised by every believer: "*in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another*". There will always be some mere bench-warmers, but every Christian's privilege and responsibility is to be involved in a spiritual "offensive", whether in public or in private. To be useful he needs the constant training by the Holy Spirit. As he allows the *Author* of the Scriptures, day by day, to be the *Interpreter* and the *Teacher*, the Word of Christ will truly dwell richly in his heart.

Not taking the Bible seriously in the way described will make him a man with a *human* message, springing from a *human* heart and mind. There may be some encouragement, some challenge, some comfort, but there will be **no cutting edge!** If the Bible is quoted at all, the "sword" will be a "blunted sword". On the other hand, he is also in danger of easily getting the Bible message muddled with human notions - liberal philosophies maybe, or perhaps conservative traditions, but not what the Lord has promised in John 16:

"When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are mine. Therefore I said that He will take of mine and declare it to you". In the end God's prophet may be giving out false prophecy – it has happened all through history.

We may think of it in terms of the story in 2 Kings 6. The situation sorely needed expansion; consequently action was envisioned and set in motion. Then one of the prophets, dramatically, lost his “cutting edge”. His ax-head goes to the bottom of the river – no hope of retrieving it. Moreover, the ax-head isn’t his own, it is borrowed - true spiritual cutting edge is never our own, it has been loaned to us by the divine Owner. Losing it is a most serious matter, yet God may graciously use some other servant of his to restore what was lost (Gal. 6:1). So it happens in this case - another prophet, of more experience, knows just what to say and what to do – *his* cutting edge is functioning. He cuts off a stick and throws it exactly where the other one lost the ax-head. It is like true counsel or prophecy - in essence supernatural - which is used by the Holy Spirit to touch the “sore spot”. It is then the ax head comes within reach. However, there is no true recovery *unless* the one who lost it, goes down on his knees – only in that position can he take it back...

In Isaiah 52:7 we find a beautiful word picture of God’s messenger. We do well to contrast that bearer-of-Good-News - the one that makes God exclaim in excitement - with the messengers who may be well organized, streamlined, and skilled, but have no more than *human* resources. When the divine, the spiritual resources are *not* real and *not* tapped into, when the Word is not dwelling richly in the heart of the messenger, even though he is a “Right Reverend” messenger, or “an angel from heaven”, as Paul says, there is no excitement or joy elicited in heaven, and lasting fruit will not appear on earth.

When a good education can be had, well and good, but a true messenger of God does not depend on education. Not having that benefit and not having qualifications to his name, does not mean he cannot be fully qualified by the Lord of the harvest. What *does* characterize him is “knee-ology” – daily he is found in the Lord’s presence, on his knees, and with an open Bible (compare Col. 1:3; 4:2-4, 12; Eph. 1:15-21; 3:14-19; 6:18). He makes it a point not only to read, but to meditate on God’s Word, and not only to meditate, but to study it, and not only to study it, but to memorize it! There is no other way to be approved as a worker who “*rightly divides the word of truth*” and needs not to be ashamed, as Paul puts it in 2 Tim. 2:15. What is required, he says, is “diligence”...

Letting his Word dwell in us richly means enjoying Christ’s ongoing training for all of the vast field that He is opening up to us. It is a field of children, youngsters, adults, elderly, singles, couples, believers and unbelievers, some far and many near. And there is the realization that there is *no* other way to become useful to the heavenly Captain in that spiritual warfare.

And then, such ministry has another dimension as well - we might call it a twin ministry. It is to the Lord himself that we minister - Paul says that with his Word richly dwelling in our hearts, we have something to sing about - we “*sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord*”.

We are left with the question, “Is HE preeminent in our hearts and minds? Does his peace thus reign in us, and among us, who are his children?” If so, his Word, as it floods our hearts and minds through daily times of reading and meditation, and weekly times of study and memorization, will reach out to those around us. And that means there will be fruit for eternity and many will bless us for having allowed the Lord to bless *them* through us!