

COLOSSIANS

CHAPTER 3

Chip Kawalsingh

1. SEEKING THINGS ABOVE (v1-2)

If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. (v1-2)

In chapter 2, Paul told these Colossian Christians that they had been buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him from the dead (2:12). That verse parallels what Paul said in Romans 6:3-5, where he portrayed baptism as a burial and resurrection with Christ—the burial of the old before-Christ person and the resurrection of the after-Christ person to new life. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul spells this out in more detail:

'I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me.' (Galatians 2:20).

The word 'seek' is present tense, which in the Greek indicates continuing action. In other words, Paul is telling these Christians to seek and to keep on seeking the things that are above. It is a lifetime quest.

2. THINK HEAVEN

We must not only seek heaven, but we must also think heaven! Paul makes it very clear in v2 he expects believers to maintain normal relationships with God in this world. Not all earthly things are evil, however things that are harmless become harmful when permitted to take the affections and priority of our lives. Our focus must be above; it's living above the below! What is the motivation? They are twofold:

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory. (v3-4)

'For you died'—Death is a serious transition. It brings everything to an end. In this case, these Colossian Christians have died to the old order. Their old selves no longer exist. But, for them, death has not been the end. They have been 'raised together with Christ' (v1)—raised to a new life.

'and your life is hidden with Christ in God'—There is a good deal of invisibility or mystery associated with God. After all, God says, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' (Isaiah 55:8-9)

3. PUT TO DEATH EVIL DESIRES WITHIN YOU

Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. You also once walked in those, when you lived in them; but now you also put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and shameful speaking out of your mouth. (v5-8)

If we have accepted citizenship of the new world in this new life we must live in it. It's supreme reality. Paul speaks candidly about the new life and our urgent need to 'put off' all the degrading tendencies of the old nature. The three imperatives of the text are 'put to death' (v5); 'rid yourself' (v8) and 'don't lie' (v9).

Put to death—sexual immorality (Greek: *porneia*) Paul extended this in 1 Corinthians 5:9: ‘When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin.’

Covetousness—The evil desire to have what is not yours. Covetousness is an inordinate desire for something that belongs to someone else; desire so intense that it has the potential to provoke the covetous person to do whatever is required to fulfil his/her desire. Paul equates covetousness with idolatry, because covetousness involves loving something other than God with an insatiable love—worshipping something other than God—making something other than God the top priority.

How can we keep from coveting something? Do we have that kind of control over our feelings? Is Paul requiring the impossible of us? The book of Ephesians tells us to ‘put on the whole armour of God, that (we) may be able to withstand in the evil day’ (Ephesians 6:13). This armour consists of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the Good News of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, ‘and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’ (6:14-17). He recommends ‘praying at all times in the Spirit’ (6:18).

4. DON'T LIE TO ONE ANOTHER

Don't lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his doings (v9)

The Greek word *pseudomai* means to lie—to say things that aren't true—but it can also imply cheating or defrauding. Both Old and New Testaments prohibit falsehood and honour truth:

- The Ten Commandments prohibit bearing false witness against a neighbour (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20).
- A person who ‘deals falsely with his neighbour in a matter of deposit, or of bargain, or of robbery...shall restore what he took...and shall add a fifth part to it’ (Leviticus 6:2-5).
- ‘You shall not lie. You shall not deceive one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and profane the name of your God’ (Leviticus 19:11b-12).
- ‘You will destroy those who speak lies. Yahweh abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man’ (Psalm 5:6).
- One of the six things that God hates was ‘a lying tongue’ (Proverbs 6:17).

5. PUT ON THE NEW MAN

and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator, where there can't be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondservant, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all. (v10-11)

Paul uses this clothing metaphor to remind the Colossian believers that they have ‘put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man’ (3:9b-10)—meaning that, when they became disciples of Christ, they became new people. They let go of their old sinful person and have assumed the role of a new person guided by the Holy Spirit. Paul's call to honesty is in keeping with his call for them to act like the new people they have become— to cast off old behaviours and to adopt new deeds (see also Romans 13:14).

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible: Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians*; Bruce, F. F., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*; Donelson, Lewis R., *Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus*; Dunham, Maxie D., *The Preacher's Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*; Hay, David M., *Abingdon New Testament Commentary: Colossians*; MacDonald, Margaret Y., *Sacra Pagina: Colossians & Ephesians*; Martin, Earnest D., *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Colossians*; Martin, Ralph P., *Interpretation: Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*; Melick, Richard R., Jr., *New American Commentary: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Vol. 32*; Moo, Douglas J., *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*; O'Brien, Peter T., *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon, Vol. 44*; Pao, David W., *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Colossians & Philemon*; Wall, Robert W., *IVP New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Ephesians*; Wright, N.T., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Colossians and Philemon, Vol. 10*