

COLOSSIANS: THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Part 6: "Hidden With Christ"

Colossians 3:1-17

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Sunday, May 30, 2021 (Trinity Sunday)

Scripture Reading

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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" (Colossians 3:1–17, ESV).

Introduction

The Old Testament tells us about this profound moment when Moses came to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the words of God. The mountain was shaking with thunder and lightning and earthquakes. Everyone in all Israel was terrified and stood far off, but Moses drew near in the darkness (Ex 20:18-21), because he wanted to know and experience the glory of God.

Later in the same story, Moses directly asks God if he can behold his glory. God tells Moses that he will answer this prayer. However, because of the utter holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, Moses is unable to stand face to face with God's full presence. So instead, God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock so that he might pass before him (Ex

33:22). And there hidden within the rock, Moses encounters God's glory. And he walks away from this moment forever changed and transformed.

As we return to our study of the New Testament book of Colossians, we might say that Paul has led his readers on a journey up a mountain. More than anything, Paul wants the Colossian Christians to know what is true of the one they call Jesus. He wants them to know that, in Jesus, the fullness of God dwells bodily (Col 2:9). He wants them to know supremacy and sufficiency of Christ against all else in this world. He wants them to know that as Moses was hidden within the rock, so too our lives are hidden with Christ, that might now behold the glory of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18)! As Moses was changed and transformed by his encounter with God, so too we must be changed and transformed by truly knowing Jesus.

For the last two chapters, Paul has been unfolding a brilliant theology of Christ's surpassing glory. Now, as he often does in his letters, Paul is going to make a practical turn. He will now essentially say, "If what I am saying about Jesus is true, how then should we live?"

And the big idea is that if Jesus really is the resurrected and ascended Lord, it must change everything about our lives! If Jesus was just a human prophet, a sage philosopher, or a compelling moral teacher, then we can just take whatever we want from Jesus and leave whatever we want. We can quote some of his sayings and let them inspire us to be better people. But we can also ignore his words if we find them disagreeable to our own desires or the desires of our culture.

But if Jesus is God, Lord, and the glorious king of the cosmos, then we cannot afford to be so cavalier. Jesus' mission is not to inspire us to be better people. He has died and risen that we might be transformed into new people.

Today's passage is an exploration on how we are to participate in a life that is *"Hidden With Christ."* We do this in three ways: by *1.) Setting Our Minds on Christ, by 2.) Putting to Death our Old Idolatries and Identities, and by 3.) Putting on Love.*

Exposition

1.) Setting Our Minds on Christ

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:1-2).

- Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again
- If this is true it is the most important truth there is
- Our thought life should reflect this

- What do you put before your minds on a daily basis?

- What is most consistently your first thought when waking up and your last thought before going to sleep?
- What captivates your imagination?
- We can believe the gospel but be captivated by another story through which we see and live our lives
- Contemporary political infatuation is an example of setting our minds on things on earth
- One sermon half an hour sermon per week versus a nightly diet of cable news
- You will start being enchanted by a vision of a kingdom, but it won't be the kingdom of God
- Devoutness to various political ideologies is increasingly becoming a dominant rival religion within an American culture
- Increasingly, it's we believe is most important and worthy of devotion; it's what we look to for salvation; it's the good news we are willing to share with our neighbors (or anyone else who will listen)
- Don't set your mind on things on earth
- There are other things that might be tempting for you to set your minds on: entertainment, sports, celebrity gossip, climbing the ladder in your profession, diet and body image
- It's not that these things are intrinsically evil; sometimes they might even be good things; they just are not meant to be ultimate

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:3–4).

- Brother Lawrence (1600s) and *Practicing the Presence of God*
- Constant prayer and conversation with God; a life in God that is not dependent on epic works and moments
- Seeing Christ in the mundane every day moments of life; turning the simplest activity into an act of worship: cooking a meal, doing dishes, performing chores
- Being aware that the Holy Spirit lives in us and that we live before God in all of life; stirring the heart to joy and gratitude in the Lord
- “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt 6:21).
- Set your mind on eternal things; allow your heart to treasure eternal things
- Christ who is your life is ascended
- Set your mind on him, so that when he appears, you also will appear with him in glory

2.) Putting to Death Our Old Idolatries and Identities

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth” (Col 3:5–8, ESV).

- Sexual immorality; “*pornenia*” (πορνεία) sex outside of biblical marriage; unchaste thoughts, words
- Impurity; anything that defiles the conscience
- Passion (disordered desire)
- Evil desire (inherently wrong desire)
- Greed; a never having contentment, always needing more, even when others are suffering from lack; taking advantage of people to make more money in your business

- Anger and wrath; violent thoughts and actions; sinfully blowing up at people in rage
- Malice; willfully desiring and seeking harm for others
- Slander; gossiping about people you know, whether they are your friend or rivals
- Obscene talk; include crude humor and cursing people with filthy language

- These things are sin
- These are not acceptable for God’s people
- These are the reason’s God’s just wrath and judgment are coming upon this world
- We must put them away

- But even more, they are not just a list of bad behaviors
- They are “*idolatry*” (ειδωλολατρία)
- There is a Hebrew form of speech know as a “chiasm,” in which the most important word or concept is placed in the center
- Paul is writing in Greek, but thinking in Hebrew
- Notice the chiasm – list of 5 & list of 5; and in the center of all of them is idolatry
- These sins are spiritual practices by which we worship counterfeit gods

- These are a part of a pagan way of life
- They bear the image of false gods
- We can learn a lot about Greek gods from Homer and Virgil
- Gods like Zeus and Hera might have been worthy of fear, but not love or respect
- They were capricious, selfish, petty; those that worship them bear their image
- The false gods of money, body image, sex, comfort, power, approval

- This is how the world lives
- This is normal for the world; those who bear the images of their gods
- This is not the way of the people of God; we are to put away these old idolatries

“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:9–10).

- We are to be renewed in the image of our creator
- The *Imago Dei*; the doctrine that all people have been made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:28); that we are imbued with dignity, value, and purpose; that we are designed to be God’s image bearers
- The image of God within humanity was fractured (not removed) in sin
- But it is restored in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:45-49)

- Put off these practices of the old self; the self that is broken and bearing the image of false gods and an old pagan way of life
- Put on the new self; which is renewed by Christ in the image of God
- Clothing metaphor – the Capitol Grille
- We are to be daily clothed in the new identity of Christ

- There are other identities that will compete for our affection

“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11).

- Paul’s list probably refers to identities that existed in the church at Colossae
- Ethnic (national) identity and economic status exist, but they are no longer our primary identities
- They must no longer demand our ultimate allegiance

- The surge of identity politics; policy through the lens power for my social group
- The enemy of the common good
- The church is to offer an inherently different way of life

- For the body of Christ, Christ is all and Christ is in all

3.) Putting on Love

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:12–14).

- Practices that “put on” Christ
- Our culture is radically individualistic
- All these practices are community oriented
- You cannot obey this passage as an isolated individual

- Kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness all require other people
- Look at the instances of “each other” or “another” in this passage
- We can believe in grace as individuals, but we can only practice grace in community

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Col 3:15).

- Letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts; Christ the king brings a right ordering of our desires; the people of God are to image a kingdom of peace with our lives
- “Be thankful”; building a culture of gratitude
- The church should be defined by kindness, humility, grace, peace, and gratitude; less than this is less than what Christ has called us to be
- Yes, we must declare the gospel with our words
- But in our culture, words alone are increasingly cheap
- We must also display the gospel of God with the way we live together
- The miracle of the early church
- Ethnic walls broken down
- Reconciliation and peace between members of hostile groups
- Radical love for the poor
- Sacrificial love for those who were abandoned and rejected
- Corporate practices that reinforce the culture of Christ

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16).

- Let the word of Christ dwell in “y’all”
- Community admonishment; big groups (preaching in large worship gatherings) and small groups (discussion in Gospel Communities)
- Prayer (the restart of prayer ministry happens today)
- Songs; receiving and giving ministry in worship
- Sacraments; thankfulness
- Sharing in joy and mourning
- The Spirit of God forms us and transforms us in worship

“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” (Col 3:17).

- Christian discipleship is constant communal immersion into a new identity and a new life of communion within the Triune God
- We have baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Conclusion

Church is the body of Christ filled with the Spirit of Christ called to continue the mission of Christ. And we are called to learn the way of Christ together.

As Jesus ascended, so our minds are to ascend to that which is eternally good and true and beautiful. As Jesus died on the cross, so we are to die to our old idolatries and our old identities that would seek to pull us into our old patterns of life. As Jesus rose again and gave grace to his enemies, so we are to rise to a new way of life that declares and displays his grace together through the way we speak Scripture over one another, sing songs over one another, and serve one another.

So let us commit to this journey together.

Redeemer Christian Church, may we run this race together. May we lay aside the weight and sin that clings so closely. May we look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith. May we embrace the life that is hidden in him. AMEN.

Ministry

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Addiction
- Relational break down
- Let us be the bear one another's burdens in prayer

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

1. Read Colossians 3:1-17. In your own words, summarize the big idea (or ideas) in this passage.
2. In practical terms, what does it look like “set your mind on things that are above” in your daily life? What does it look like when we set our minds on “things that are on earth” instead?
3. What is the significance of Paul connecting the list of sins in Col 3:5 to “idolatry”?
4. In our own culture, we tend to derive a lot of meaning from our ethnic identity and/or economic status. How should Col 3:11 inspire the people of God to be distinct from the world?
5. Read Col 3:12-17 again, and observe how it is impossible to obey this passage outside of participation in Christian community. Why are the communal practices described in this passage so important in a highly individualistic culture like our own?