

12,17,20 Col. 3 vs. 5-17 New Creation Life

We saw last week that “seeking those things which are above” is meant to be the mindset of the Christian.

Our home is not here, but at the right hand of God in Christ.

Christ is the indwelling source of all spiritual life. Outside of Him, there is no life – only deception and death.

George McDonald put it succinctly when he wrote, “All that is not God is death.”

We have passed from death to life and only our own rebellion or the deception of the enemy can pull us back into spiritual death.

When Miles Stanford talked about ‘position’ vs. ‘condition’ and explained what the bottom-line was regarding our position in Christ and how that position is brought into our living experience, he said simply that another word for position is “source”.

Christ is the source of our life. He doesn’t give us life; He *is* our life

We’ve talked about these things before, so you may already understand this, but before the next section of Colossians will make sense, this has to be the grid or context we use to understand what Paul is going to say.

Here’s our passage (Col. 3:5-17), where Paul sets up two listings – one is a list of all that represents the old man, the old life; the other is the fruit of our new lives in Christ. And Paul is appealing to us to put off the old and put on the new.

For example, in the first section he writes;

“Therefore, put to death . . . fornication, uncleanness, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry . . . anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language (etc.).

Then in the second part, he writes;

“And have put on the new man . . . where there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free . . . (put on kindness, humility, longsuffering, forgiving one another . . . but above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfection. . . “

But Paul doesn't make this appeal to us before first establishing us in Christ as a completely new creation where nothing of the old applies.

Nearly every commentary or message given on this section of scripture exhorts us to 'behave' in a way that matches the moral instruction and lifestyle of the Lord.

They may or may not realize it, but they are telling us to imitate what we know to be right.

But that's not what Paul is doing.

And if you've tried that over the years, you know that it doesn't work.

For those of you, like me, who have Romans 7 as their life chapter, you already know that it doesn't work.

Like all of us, we learn by experience. As a young believer, Paul wanted to please the Lord and do what was right, but instead he kept doing what was wrong and hated himself for it.

But he was trapped in that cycle and couldn't get out.

We all have to go through that to realize that you and I can't live the Christian life.

We can't imitate Christ. He is the first of a completely different species of humanity which has nothing in common with Adam's race.

As F. J. Huegel puts it; "The Christian life is not imitation; it's participation."

Paul already told us that "Christ is our life. . ." and that He is meant be "all and in all". Everything else has been crucified – all that is of Adam went into the grave and a Second Man, the Last Adam, came out in resurrection.

In vs. 3 Paul told us that "(we) died and (our) life is hidden with Christ in God."

If we've died to all that we were in Adam, how can we expect to live the Christian life using the same determination and disciplines we once used before we came to Christ?

In Gal. 2:20 Paul wrote, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in this body, I live by faith in (and by the faith of) the Son of God."

It won't be until we personally understand how to live by the life of another Person that we will be living the normal Christian life.

As I mentioned earlier, most commentators approach the exhortations in Col. 3 the same way all religions approach morality.

"God's given you a brain, use it to make good choices.'

So, instead of embracing a whole new approach to life, we fall back into joining the Christian religion.

And of course, what happens to many believers is that they have to choose between constantly falling short of these high standards or they have to lower the standards to what they feel is reasonable so they don't live in perpetual guilt.

Neither of those is God's solution.

His answer to all of this is to crucify us and then raise us in Christ to newness of life; not to a stronger old life made better, but a new life that we've never known before.

Rom. 6:2-7; "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin."

It makes no sense to live the way we lived before when that life is dead to us. It's not just an issue of morality, its an issue of who we were versus who we are now.

Trying really hard to be good is not the same as spontaneously living out from who we are in Christ.

One is religion; one is relationship. One is trying to adapt our minds to a different or improved morality; the other is drawing our lives from another Source altogether.

We used to be independent, determining right and wrong, good and bad, truth and error through the use of our five senses and reason and intellect.

Now we're told that all those things have to be reshaped by the indwelling Christ. We are no longer independent and struggling to live in our own strength and intellectual resources, religious or otherwise.

We are now meant to be learning how to be completely dependent on the Lord for every breath we take, which is how we were designed to function based on the way we were created.

When Man walked away from God, he built the world we see around us; a world that has excluded God and replaced him with Man at his best – a world in complete spiritual blackout.

When God's life went out of Adam, the light went out and sin, coupled with relative morality, reigned in the human race.

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In our passage in Col. 3, Paul divides his exhortations into two categories; the first section tells us what to "put off" and the second section tells us what to "put on".

But both sections are established on the foundation that in Christ certain things have already been crucified and other things are incorporated into the resurrection life of the new creation.

We aren't being asked to do something that has not already been done in Christ and which can be mediated to us by His Spirit as we abide in Him.

Let me share something by Sparks on this:

"It is the new creation again, in Christ a new man has come, and that affects all our dispositions in our relationships with one another. Lie not, put away wrath, anger, and so on; all those things which divide belong to the old

creation; the old man. In Christ there is a new creation. When do we taste the first glory of the new creation experience? Every time we let go something of the old creation, in the reception of Christ in some way. When we say, 'Now, Lord, it does not matter what it costs me of humiliation, if I have to be weak, foolish and despised, nevertheless I must show the Spirit of Christ.' When we get through to that position, we know in our own hearts that the new creation really is a new creation; we have a fresh taste of the joy of new life."

The enemy wants us to try to live the Christian life as anyone adopting a new religion would try to live its principles. He doesn't want us to understand that this life is a life received from a Source other than ourselves.

He wants us to try and live *for* Christ; he doesn't want Christ to live *through* us.

As we saw last week, there is no inner peace or freedom anywhere but in the atmosphere of truth. Religion is a subtle but paralyzing lie.

I'm going to try to explain this from another angle with the help of a couple of authors. This is kind of long, so bear with me. Try to track with what they're saying because their explanations are the best I've seen. I could never communicate this as well as these guys do;

"The criterion of the highest and perfect moral state of mind is pleasure; when good acts are not only done, but when we take pleasure in doing them. We are certainly required to do them, whether we like it or no; and obedience for conscience sake, which is carried out against inclination, is deserving of praise, and is constantly urged upon us; but it is still an inferior moral state compared with that in which the inclination's themselves are on the side of good. Looking into the real nature of the case, we cannot but call it a state of servitude when a man's affections do not go along with his work, but he submits to duty as a yoke which a superior power or law imposes on him. We have, then, two stages of experience, both included in the life of the Christian – the one being animated by a sense of right, the other by the power of a new life; the power of the love of God within us. We may illustrate these stages by calling one the duty-life and the other the love-life. We may be within the first, and yet not within the second; but it is impossible to be within the second and not be within the first. So, if we are

‘dwelling in love’ (living by the life of Christ), we shall know what it is to do the right for its own sake as well as from inclination. And it is not difficult to see which of the two conditions is the true life of liberty.”

And to add some comments on this from an article by Dr. Mozley,

“The truth must be admitted, that many who belong visibly to the dispensation of the Spirit are still inwardly under the law in this sense, that their desires are not yet on the side of God’s service and that, if they perform their duties to any degree, it is only in obedience to a law, the penalties of which they stand in just and proper fear, but they do not stand on the spiritual principles of love. . .Hence, while faith makes all things possible, it is love that makes all things desirable.”

Evan Hopkins adds this;

“There can be no real peace or liberty for a soul in that condition. We can conceive of a case in which the will is strong and the passions are held well under control. And what have you? You have a life of outward abstinence from the evil and of conformity to the good, but not a life of joy and freedom. You have a man who walks conscientiously, it is true; but he knows nothing of real delight and freedom in the service of God. The force of conscience and the power of the will may be sufficient to keep the passions under restraint, but what a sense of strain and perpetual bondage within. Christ’s yoke is felt to be constantly pressing. It is not found to be easy, nor His burden to be light. Now let us suppose such a one is brought under the power of a fuller and deeper personal work of the Holy Spirit. Let us suppose that Divine love sanctifies his desires to the same degree that Divine truth has emancipated his mind – what then? A complete change takes place in his whole life. Because he begins to love and delight in the right, as well as recognize it’s excellence, he now finds it easy to do it. He begins to like what God commands. Then he finds the truth in his own experience of those words, ‘His commandments are not grievous’. Here then is the secret of liberty and delight in the service of the Lord.

“It is not by straining and struggling that this blessed condition is brought about; it comes by a very real and personal dedication of ourselves to God for this very purpose, with this as the special end and aim in view.”

Now, I'm hoping that our section in Colossians can be understood in a new light, rather than through the grid of religion and legalism.

And that all the commands we see in the New Testament can be seen as simply education for a new humanity, to lead us from bondage to the freedom of righteousness in Christ.

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There is nothing instant about this in terms of our experience. The process of sanctification, of bringing us experientially into our position in Christ, is lifelong.

But the thing we need to remember, to avoid having the wrong focus, is that all of this is the work of the Holy Spirit *within* us – it is not our obedience to an external listing of commandments written in stone.

As Paul told the Philippians; “It is God who works *in* you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13).

This isn't moral discipline that has its source in us – its transfiguration from within into the image of Christ, which is completely different than self-transformation from outside.

The change that takes place in the gradual sanctification of the believer is by the power of God that works (lit. energizes) within us.

Our responsibility is to know what is, and what is not, the Christ-life and to cooperate with the Lord as He brings us into, and through, the circumstances He desires to use to get us there.

It is not to our advantage to kick against whatever God has brought into our lives to free us from the flesh and establish us, experientially, in Christ.

By resisting our suffering, we are pushing against the very thing God is doing to form Christ in us.

Remember what we saw last week in Daniel 12:9;

“Many shall be purified . . . and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.”

Now, let's see if we can use some of Paul's specific exhortations to contrast the two species of humanity and expose the true, inner life of each.

As we saw earlier, he starts by listing certain identifying characteristics of the old humanity and then lists identifiers of our new life in Christ:

The life of the new humanity is significantly different than the Adamic life. But, again, it's not just an issue of moral improvement but of exchanging the nature of fallen man in order to become partakers of the divine nature in Christ.

It's losing one life to gain another life.

We don't need to dissect each of these lists, they're self-explanatory, but I want to use one thing Paul identifies as part of the new creation to show something foundational to *all* of what he's saying.

In vs. 11 he wrote, "There is neither Greek nor Jew. . ."

If we want to make a present-day application, we could say that the old creation Christianity has denominations, but there is no such thing in the new humanity.

However, again, it's not just a matter of not dividing the body of Christ into denominational pieces.

In Robertson's Word Pictures he explains the meaning of vs. 11. The *real* meaning is stronger in the original.

Robertson writes,

"In this New Man in Christ, there *does not exist* Greek or Jew. . ."

A million aberrations of what the body of Christ is *may exist on earth* because of man's ignorance of the spiritual nature of the new creation, but at the right hand of God in Christ, these things have never, and will never, enter in.

They simply do not exist in the true body of Christ— and they shouldn't exist on earth either.

So, we don't just read a passage like this, or like 1 Cor. 1 "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, etc." and decide that what we should do is be involved *only* in non-denominational churches.

That's missing Paul's whole point.

The reason we don't denominationalize the body of Christ is because in the true ecclesia of God, divisions do not exist.

Christians whose understanding of the Bible and of the Church is limited to an academic understanding may realize that we should all be one universal, happy family, but they've never seen the Church as it was revealed to Paul as the mystery of the Christ corporately expressed in His spiritual body.

This came by revelation, not by intellect.

The same is true of everything Paul is saying in this section of Colossians 3. We either see this in a spiritual way – a way that reveals the heart and soul of Christ's life behind the externals – or we don't see it at all.

And if that's the case, all we do is try to imitate and obey what's on the page without seeing what lies behind everything the Holy Spirit has written.

I want to share some comments by Sparks that do a great job of explaining the driving force behind a genuine, spiritual commitment to Christ;

"If you are consumed with love for the Lord, you will be very quick to discern what is doubtful and questionable. You will not need to be continuously told when a thing is not right. No, love for the Lord will bring you quickly to see and to sense there is something that needs to be adjusted. You may not know what it is at the time, but you have a sense that all is not well. Love will do it. All the instruction in the world will not bring you to it. You may have the Word of God brought to you on all such points, and you might even say, "All right, because you say so, because it is in the Bible, I will do it, I will be obedient." But, mark you, if this love, this discerning love, has really filled your heart by all the intelligence of the Holy Spirit indwelling you, you will sense it without being told; or if it should be brought to you from the Word, that which is within you will say, "Yes, I know that is right, the Lord tells me that is right." Do you not think that is the kind of Christian that is needed, and what the Lord needs at the end? That is what He has had in mind from the beginning. You do not have to follow people around and say, "Please do this; have you never taken note that you might be helpful in this way?" You do not have to do that where there is devotion, aliveness, alertness, perception, readiness to do without being all the time told to do it. Real

devotion to the Lord is something that far outreaches legality. First love is discerning love.”

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Young Christians need the commandments written on stone; they need direction by external instructions *until* they can begin to understand how to live by the *internal* leading of the Spirit.

But more mature believers are a different situation.

As Paul told the Romans in chapter 8:14; “. . . as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

The word translated “sons” is not the same word we see in 1 Jn. translated, “children”. The word in Romans refers to mature sons, whereas the word in 1 Jn. refers to spiritual infants.

Those led by the Spirit of God are the “mature” sons of God - against such there is no law, because their lives manifest the fruit of the Spirit, not simply the letter of a written code.

It’s not Moses that is coming through them, it’s the life of Jesus being made manifest through their mortal flesh.

I’ll close with something an author wrote that shows how these distinctions of spiritual vs. carnal and mature vs. immature are becoming increasingly apparent in the body of Christ globally in this generation and what that implies for us.

“Watch things now and in the near future. I do not want to assume the role of a prophet. I don’t think we need a prophet to see what is going to take place. I think we are going more and more to see that these things which represent mixture among the Lord's people are going to come very much under the sword of the Lord, that a real purifying work is going to be done, and those who will not be purified unto God in these coming days are going out. That is, God is going to affect a new separation in an inward way among His people to get them into a more surrendered position; everything is forcing that necessity.

“Things which have pre-occupied Christians, which are things - religious things even Christian things as such, but which have had elements of mixture in them in the methods and means employed - are coming under the hammer now and they are not going to be so easy of pursuit and utilization in the future. We are coming to the place where it is going to be the Lord, or nothing. If the Lord does not get us through, we are not going through. If the Lord is not our portion, we have no portion. Things which may be more or less good are being cut off, and the people of God are being brought to a position where, if the Lord is not their sufficiency, their portion, they are found lacking. Surely it must be increasingly like that in many parts of the world today.

“But then do not just keep an objective eye upon the situation. Remember again that this is what the Lord means by our trials, our fires and furnaces of affliction. He is purifying us, He is heading up this work which shall eventuate in this glorious realization - "Worthy art Thou... for Thou was slain, and did purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests: and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10).

All that we see around us, and all that we are experiencing in us, is the Lord's determined pursuit, according to His eternal councils, to complete the formation of His end-time spiritual remnant – to prepare a people equipped, purified and spiritually ready to share in the throne of Christ.

This is God's final hour of spiritual development in His people in this age, and the church is becoming visibly and spiritually divided along the lines of those who have “put off the old man” and have “put on the new man”, as over against those who have no clue what the meaning of either of those commands imply.

As we continue to grow in Christ, His life will be increasingly formed in us. Our role is to cooperate with all that He is doing so He can complete what's He's begun.

Eventually, Christ will be all in all – in us and in all of creation.

