

8 See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.⁹ For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily,¹⁰ and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ;¹² and you were buried with him and raised with him in glory through the power of God, who raised him from the dead.¹³ And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,¹⁴ having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.¹⁵ He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.^d

16 Therefore no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or of a festival or of a new moon or of Sabbaths, for these will shadow the substance to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you

9 Jn 1.14, 16; 2 Cor 5.19; Col 1.19; 10 Eph 3.19; 1.21-22; 1 Cor 15.24; Eph 3.10; Col 2.15; 12 Rom 6.4-5; Eph 2.6; Acts 2.24; 1 Pet 3.21; 13 Eph 2.1, 5; Col 2.15; Acts 3.19; Rom 7.4; 1 Pet 2.24; 14 Eph 1.21; Is 53.12; Mt 12.29; Jn 12.31; 2 Cor 2.14; 16 Rom 14.1-12; Mk 7.19; Heb 9.10; Lev 11.44; 17 Eph 1.23; Heb 8.5; 10.1; 18 1 Cor 9.24; Phil 3.14; Col 2.23; 1 Cor 4.6; 19 Rom 1.17; Gal 4.3, 9; 21 1 Cor 7.1; 22 1 Cor 6.13; Is 29.13; Mt 15.9; Mk 7.7; Th 1.14; 23 Col 2.18; 1 Tim 4.1-3; Rom 13.14; 1 Tim 4.8; 24 Col 3.1-4; Phil 3.18; 25 Col 3.13; 26 Col 3.13; 27 Col 3.13; Phil 1.21; 3.21; 1 Pet 1.13; 1 Jn 2.28; 3.2; 5 Rom 8.13; Gal 5.24; Eph 4.19; 5.3, 5; Col 2.11; Mt 5.29-30; 6 Rom 1.18; Eph 2.3; 5.6; 7 Eph 2.2; Th 3.3; 8 Eph 4.22; 29, 31; 5.4; Jas 1.21; 9 Rom 8.13; Eph 4.22, 25; 10 Eph 4.23-24; Rom 12.2; 2 Cor 4.16; Rom 8.29; Gen 1.26; Eph 2.10; 11 Rom 10.12; 1 Cor 12.13; 15.28; Gal

submit to regulations,²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"²² (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines?²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.^e

3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.³ For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming.⁷ In these you once walked, when you lived in them.

But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk. Do not lie to one another, as you have done, for you are holy, as God's elect, blameless as the world's practice, as you have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.¹¹ Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience,¹³ forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.¹⁴ And above all these

Reflections on Colossians 3

3,28; 1 Cor 7.19; Gal 5.6; Acts 28.2; 2 Maccabees 4.47; Eph 6.8; 1.23 12 Lk 18.7; Gal 5.22-23; Phil 2.1; Eph 4.2; Phil 2.3; 1 Cor 13.4; 2 Cor 6.6; 1 Pet 2.9 13 Eph 4.2; Mt 6.14; Jn 13.15; Rom 15.7; 2 Cor 2.7; Eph 4.32 14 Rom 13.8, 10; Eph 4.2-3; Jn 17.23

^d Or in it (that is, the cross) ^e Or are of no value, serving only to indulge the flesh
^f Other ancient authorities add upon the sons of disobedience

Introduction

When God gave me this booklet, I was taking a break from writing. I intended to allow God to minister His word to my heart for no other purpose than to know Him. The Lord drew me to Colossians chapter three and initiated an enjoyable season of nurturing.

Originally, I decided not even to take notes on what God was sharing with me. But the power of what I was reading won the day. It was too good to waste.

As I continued to soak in these verses, ideas for a booklet spontaneously sprang to mind. At first, I resisted these thoughts. I was, after all, taking a break. But the ideas persisted and grew until it was taking more work to ignore them than to pursue them. The booklet came together with virtually no effort on my part. I continued to rest and God continued to work.

Little has been done to organize the material in this booklet. I merely set down my reflections as they appeared in my notebook. Although a definite theme runs through all the entries, I have made no attempt to connect the thoughts in any larger way. I pray the reader will experience in these reflections the same spontaneity and newness of life that I did.

Reflections on Colossians 3

Our life is hidden with Christ. We are no longer seen. What is mortal is swallowed up of life (2 Cor. 5:4). We no longer live but Christ lives (Gal. 2:20).

Adam hid from God, as do those who are of the adamic nature. But Christ—and all who are in Him—is hid in God.

Not only is our life hidden with Christ, but the life spoken of here is *zoe*, divine life, the life Christ is. “Your life” is not you. The life that is ours is of another kind. Genesis chapter one tells us that every creature comes forth from its own kind. Christ is the kind from which we come forth, from whom our life is. Our life is not *bios* (physical life), or *psuche* (the self-life). Our life—who we now are—is the life that we have since we have been raised with Christ. It is the life above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1).

We are told not to set our minds on things on the earth (Col. 3:2). That is not where our life comes from. That is not where our life is. The life that related to the old creation, that was the old creation, died. Our new life—our divine life—is in another place, above, raised, in God. In Him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28).

We are told to deaden our members that are on the earth. We are from above, not from the earth. It was through our members we related to this creation, this fallen world, through our members we carried on the intercourse of sin. But no more. “For you died.” Because one died for all, all died (2 Cor. 5:14). The members, the medium of our sinful intercourse with the earth, were cut off. Like broken roots, they are powerless to draw the earth into us, powerless to hold us down in it. We are free, free in Christ and above. We no longer have members that drink sin from the earth. We ARE members of Christ: one body drawing one life from the one God.

There is no communion between the two, between the earth and things above. One is death, the other resurrection from the dead. What greater difference could there be? One is six feet under and being devoured by the earth. The other has the earth under its feet, able to shake the dust off when it tries to cling.

“Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Nothing can touch that life. Nothing can tarnish it. “With Christ,” is the falling of an imposing gate, and, “in God,” is an impregnable fortress. Its moat is the chasm between heaven and earth. “With Christ in God,” is the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, appearing with Christ her life in glory (Rev. 21:10, 11). Nothing impure will ever pass her gates (Rev. 21:27).

“For you died.” What blessed rest there is for a dead man. Nothing is required of him. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘They will rest from their labors, for their deeds will follow them.’” (Rev. 14:13). At a man’s funeral, his employer will not slide up the casket and say, “Bill, I’ll still need those reports on Monday.” Neither will his wife, clutching a tissue to her nose, tearfully ask if he remembered to take out the garbage. In the same way, God won’t come to a dead man and say, “Thou shalt,” or “Thou shalt not....” The dead man is no more able to honor his father and mother than he is able to commit murder or

adultery. He has no capacity for good or evil. Instead, our labors belong to Christ. If something divine is accomplished through us, Christ is the source. If we sin or fall short, that too is Christ's: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

"For you died." Ecclesiastes expounds what it means to be dead with Christ:

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate, and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. [...] Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom (Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10).

Unlike the living, who anxiously anticipate death, the dead in Christ are no longer enslaved by the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). The dead know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). They have no further reward. Whatever was gain to them they now consider loss for the sake of Christ (Php. 3:7). The dead in Christ are new creations. Old things have passed away. The memory of what they were is forgotten, and we no longer know them according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16, 17). Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions—love, hate, jealousy—and desires (Gal. 5:24). They have no part in anything that happens under the sun because the world is crucified to them and they to the world (Gal. 6:14). In the world, activities are pursued with might, striving, ambition. But the dead in Christ rest. Christ's energy works powerfully in them (Col. 1:29). Christ is living in them and is doing His work (John 14:10). Dead men do not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through them (Rom. 15:18). In Christ, there is no working, planning, knowledge, or wisdom. Christ has been made for us wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

"Since then you have been raised with Christ," the form or manner of our life on earth should be of little concern to us. Whether we are in need or have plenty, the secret of being content in every situation is that we can do everything through Him who gives us strength (Php. 4:12, 13). Our life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions (Luke 12:15). It does not consist in our state of employment: whether we work one or two jobs, whether we minister full-time or raise children full-time, whether we live comfortably or paycheck to paycheck. Our life consists in "things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). It is there we are told to set our hearts, where moth and rust do not destroy, where thieves do not break in and steal (Matt. 6:19-21).

When Paul says, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature," he assumes that "you died," and also, "you died with Christ" (Col. 2:20; 3:3, 5). We cannot put to death unless we are already dead. Paul is not giving a command with the expectation that we fulfill it. He is asking us to believe in what Christ has already fulfilled. He is commanding us, as we live day to day in the world, to remain above, where we are already dead in Christ, hidden in Christ, raised in Christ, to remain where old things—immorality, evil desires, covetousness, and the other things he lists—have passed away and all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Romans 8:13 is a good companion scripture: "[F]or if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live." As we remain in Christ, the Spirit is released to realize the death of Christ in our bodies.

“Since then you have been raised with Christ....” We have been raised. What we were in the uncircumcision of our sinful nature was left in the earth, buried with Christ. It is no more. It has no more claim on us. It has no more association with us. We have no more responsibility for it, to change it, to feel bad for it, to bear guilt for it. Certainly, God convicts us when the unholiness of that nature manifests. Certainly, loving others means we repent and apologize when we sin and injure them. But since we have been raised we are to set our hearts “on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 1:1). We are not to set our hearts on those earthly things we were but are not now. Christ is not there. Why do we look for the Living among the dead? (Luke 24:5). We are to set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated. What is in that place? Hebrews says, “After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven” (Heb. 1:3). The purification of sins—all sins, forever—is there. Revelation says, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21). Overcoming is there, and a share in the throne of God as well. If we do not remain in Him, how else will we overcome and walk in purity? “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:3).

We have this affection for ourselves, for our old life. We do not really want it to die. We want to help it, to change it, to rehabilitate it, and we want God to share our sympathy with self. This is as when Abram prayed that God would bless Ishmael, the fruit of his flesh (Gen. 17:18). Or, like Samuel, we continue to pity and to pray for Saul in us when God is altogether done with him: “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king?” (1 Sam 16:1). When the people of Israel were past reform, God told Jeremiah, “So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you” (Jer. 7:16). God’s plan is not to rehabilitate the old self. He crucified it and is finished with it. He wants us to leave it, to set our hearts and minds on things above, where Christ is seated, where our life is now hidden. Rather than wrestle with the old, we can just walk away from it. God wishes this to be simple for us, but our affection for self makes it a struggle. We mourn and pray for ourselves. We cry and beg God to covenant with our flesh. And yet if we saw how many of our tears flow from self-love we would cry less and believe more. God does not answer prayers for the old self. Christ is our new self, and He is ours without struggle, without tears. God would not have us try to change the old self (which is like a leopard changing its own spots) (Jer. 13:23). He would merely have us change clothes: “[Y]ou have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self,” which is Christ (Col. 3:9, 10).

“For you died....” These three little words are a mountain to our faith. They are hard to believe because we live with ourselves every day. We can’t be rid of ourselves, of our petty reactions, our selfish desires, our vanity, and all the myriad of other ways we are a plague unto ourselves. Sin just keeps popping up. But we are dead: “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Rom. 6:6, 7). Adam, the root and source of sin, was destroyed at the cross. We are free.

Sometimes a corpse will move reflexively. Or, if a dead person's chest is compressed, residual air in the lungs will be forced out, vibrating the vocal cords, and causing a moan. But such occurrences do not mean a person has come back to life. In the same way, the sinful nature manifesting does not mean that death has not occurred. "You died," and all the reflexive jerking of Adam won't change that.

"You died," as in, **"You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall keep the Sabbath."** The one whom the commandments addressed ("You") is no more. And where there is no one to command, there is no further use for the commandment.

Death is only really complete when we are alive with Christ. A dead man isn't a changed man. A man is only changed when he has new life. A dead man might be dead to sin, but he isn't living unto God (Rom. 1:10). A dead man is the same as he was when he lived in sin except that now he is dead in sin. Or, to say it another way, a dead man is only a man over whom sin has exerted full dominion. Only when life comes into the dead man and shatters the domination of sin is a man other than what he was. For what more can sin work than death? If, then, God gives life to us through the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, sin has no further recourse against us (Rom. 8:11). God has rendered its greatest power useless.

God does not require us to be anything but dead and hidden with Christ in God. How can a dead man be anything? What can he be that will please God? God is not more pleased with some activities than others. He is not more pleased by our religious activities than with others. He doesn't want super-evangelists, prayer warriors, and the like. He wants us to be dead, hidden, raised. If Christ in us does no more than work 9 to 5 and raise 2.5 kids, then we should rest in that and receive God's pleasure in His Son. If He has us disciple many and minister in the church, we should again rest in that and receive God's pleasure in His Son and not in our activities. For how many years did being about His Father's business mean that Jesus did mundane things? He was no less about His Father's business when obeying His parents or learning the trade of carpentry than He was when casting out demons or teaching in the temple courts. In fact, the majority of His life was spent carrying out unspectacular duties related to family and occupation. Only the last few years of His short life were spent in public ministry. In this, God shows us that He is in every part of life, not just the small part we hallow simply because it includes explicitly religious activity. God is pleased by His Son in us, and His Son is in us at all times. Therefore, whatever we do, we should do "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders" (1 Thess. 4:11, 12). Paul's charge doesn't sound very ambitious. It seems to lack all zeal for the kingdom, all vision for reaching the world with the gospel. Just live life in Christ and Him in us? This can't be enough for God. But being an average person full of Jesus is more valuable to God, and will draw more into His kingdom, than 100 super-ministers who think they please God by their zeal.

Nothing can change the fact that we died. Now, we may not believe it, and when our members respond to temptation we often believe that over God's word. But nothing can change the fact that the cross happened. Jesus said, "It is finished," and when He said that He meant it every bit as much as this creation is finished (John 19:30). Since the resurrection, He has been seated at God's right hand, the Lord of the Sabbath, resting in the eternal seventh day, His work on the cross having brought forth a new creation. And it is into His rest we are invited, into the unalterable fact of the cross, which does not change with our successes, failures, or feelings (Heb. 4:3, 10, 11). We are dead. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.

"For you died..." You—subject to sin, harassed by the devil, victimized by fluctuating emotions, seduced by this passing world—died. Your story, your life, your history (as well as that of all mankind) is two words: THE END. You have now been given a new story in Christ, and it begins, "When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was" (John 1:1, NEB). What God is, the Word is. And what the Word is, we are. The Word is "dead to sin and alive to God" (Rom. 6:10, 11). The Word is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). The Word of God is strong in us and has overcome the evil one (1 John 2:14). The world is passing away, but the Word remains forever (Matt. 24:35). Where there is no "you," there is nothing on which oppression may act. Where once was a slave subject to the whim of every master is now the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). What a refuge we have today, now, this very moment—"I no longer live but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

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The word is not just knowledge about God. Rather, as John 1:1 says, “the Word was God.” It is hoped that the reader will not just receive knowledge or teaching about God but God Himself. “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”

(John 17:3).

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