

Our passage for today is based on Paul's theology of baptism, which he first mentioned in 2:12. ¹² *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.* In the parallel letter of Ephesians, which was written around the same time as Colossians, Paul stated that the incredible power that raised Christ from the dead was working in us. (Ephesians 1:19-23) Since he didn't elaborate, he must have known that the Colossians understood the concept. Before we go further, let us make sure that we do.

Modern American Christian lifestyles differ little from the average person who makes no claim to have faith in Christ. Apparently most people who call themselves Christians don't understand that a believer in Jesus dies with Jesus on the cross and is raised with Christ to a new life. It must be a concept that we have lost or intentionally ignore. So just what does it mean?

In chapter two, Paul compared it to the first covenant rite of circumcision. (2:11) That represented a cutting away of our old Adam nature, a separation from it, to be a people separated for God, a nation of priests. (Exodus 19:5-6) The old nature was defined in the Garden of Eden as living by what looks enjoyable, what is pleasurable to do, and what will exalt us over others. (Genesis 3:6; 1John 2:16) The Apostle John calls it the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. When we come to Christ and seek forgiveness, we nail that worldliness to the cross with Jesus and it dies with Him. (2:14)

Too many come to Jesus with a desire to have the promise of heaven but no desire to die to their worldly nature. They want forgiveness but don't want to make any changes. This is the main reason so many will balk at accepting the salvation of Jesus. They know that repentance means a change in the way we live. If I love my wife, and say I am sorry for not acting like it, and then go on living as I please, is my repentance genuine? Your actions prove your words are sincere or not. If you repent of your selfish indulgence in the world, then there should be a radical change in your life. This is what Paul calls dying with Jesus. (Romans 6:8)

The change is just as evident in what is new as it is in what is no longer. Just because there is generosity and self-sacrifice does not necessarily mean you are a new creation. The new life is resurrection life, Holy Spirit empowered life. **If you truly die with Jesus, then you will be raised with Jesus to newness of life.** There is an entire shift in desires. They were once selfishly indulgent, but now they become God centered desires. You want to do the things that please Him because that is what pleases you. (Psalm 37:4)

Commented [Paul1]: Ephesians 1:19-23 (ESV)

¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might
²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Commented [Paul2]: Colossians 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Commented [Paul3]: Exodus 19:5-6 (ESV)

⁵Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;
⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

Commented [Paul4]: Genesis 3:5-6 (ESV)

⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Commented [Paul5]: 1 John 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Commented [Paul6]: Colossians 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Commented [Paul7]: Romans 6:8 (ESV)

⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Commented [Paul8]: Psalm 37:4 (ESV)

⁴Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

In addition to a desire shift, there is a power shift. All the pleasure and pride seeking came at the efforts of our own cunning and ability. The power to walk in a way that pleases God, led by His Spirit, is empowered by His Spirit. It is not that we don't make an effort, but that our effort is supernaturally empowered. (Philippians 2:13) We cooperate with a much greater power and our meager efforts get carried along in the current of His will. It's a bit like rowing downstream.

Commented [Paul9]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So Paul begins with the supposition that this is what has happened already in the life of the Colossian believers. They died and were raised with Christ. Then he points to what should be the result of that death and resurrection. ¹ *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* Seek the things that are above in contrast to what you once sought. Set your heart on those things. (NIV) Again, in the parallel letter of Ephesians, Paul clarifies a bit more the things that are below. He tells us that we all gratified the cravings of our sinful nature and followed its desires and thoughts. We were by nature objects of wrath. But because we were loved so much, God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:3-7)

Commented [Paul10]: Ephesians 2:3-6 (ESV)

³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

The things that are above are privileges we have in Christ. We have His love! We have a destiny and a calling. We have the promise of heaven and heavenly rewards for our labor. We have the entire family of God that will be perfected and can look forward to uninterrupted fellowship with them. We have fellowship with God!

I went through a time of discouragement awhile back. I got my eyes on the world instead of on Christ. I started counting problems and discouragements instead of counting blessings. A pastor friend of mine calls it "thumb sucking". What a great phrase! Are you "thumb sucking" this week? Aren't we too big to suck our thumbs? So I pulled my thumb out of my mouth (figuratively) and started realizing I was raised with Christ! And what do you know, the place I was in Scripture that morning reminded me, ²² *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* Hebrews 12:22-24 (ESV) Wow! All that is ours!

That's seeking the things that are above! Loving our Savior for all He has done for us and seeking His will in every situation is a result. That even includes how I respond to adversity and disappointment. If Eve was seeking the things that were above when the Tempter came, what a different history we would have had. If you and I sought the

things that were above, what a difference our lives would have been and can be in the future!

As I watched the pictures in Japan of the tsunami carrying off homes, cars, fields and greenhouses as if they were toys on the beach, I realized that it related to our passage that I was working on. Some of those people will be devastated because their hearts were set on all the things that were swept away. Others will go on with little change in their daily exuberance for life because their hearts are set on things above. What a difference! (2Corinthians 4:18)

Paul says those things above are where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. He's making one of the most common references in the new covenant, that of Psalm 110. We touched on that briefly two weeks ago. The first verse says,¹ *The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."* Psalm 110:1 (ESV) King David calls someone his Lord. YHWH (the eternal God) says to David's Lord to sit at His right hand. That is a place of authority and power. The position and authority are secured, but the final submission of the world ("your enemies") is yet to come. The next verse tells us the Lord will rule in the midst of His enemies. It was how the early church came to understand what seemed to be a contradiction in the prophecies of Messiah. He reigns but not yet over all. That part of the prophecies is yet to come. Still, Jesus' victory is accomplished. He reigns in our hearts and one day soon will reign on the earth as the enemies of our Lord are put under His feet.

We are still in that time of Jesus sitting and waiting until the times are fulfilled. In the meantime, the enemies are out sowing false teaching. The spirits that were defeated by the cross are still sowing the idea of works, rules, and esoteric experiences instead of a relationship with Jesus. In Ephesians Paul calls these powers spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12) That is what we are struggling against and that was what was behind the false teacher in Colossae.

When we listen to them, we turn our eyes to the world and our pride tells us we are not doing enough. We desire to be more respected by others, so we discipline our body even more and purchase the latest class on "The Secret Teachings of Jesus" or whatever lie they are peddling at the time. All the while we have everything we need in Jesus who is willing to live in us. Turn the eyes of your heart upon Jesus!

² *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* It is not only our heart that must be set on things above, but our mind as well. Both verses are telling us that these are urgent actions that must be taken. We must seek heavenly things. We must be mindful of the things above. In the second verse, we are called to discipline our thought life. That thumb sucking that I spoke of earlier, is the result of

Commented [Paul11]: 2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)

¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Commented [Paul12]: Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

focusing on earthly things and situations. The more you focus your thoughts on the world, the more depressed and discouraged you become. We must capture our thoughts and turn them toward heaven, toward all that we have in Christ and the sure outcome of our faith, if we want to continue by faith. (2Corinthians 10:5)

Jesus warned that if we take our hand off the plow and look back, we aren't fit for the kingdom of Heaven. (Luke 9:62) Our hand on the plow is laboring for our King in His field, the world. Looking back is taking our eyes off of Jesus and turning them back to the weed saturated fields of self-centeredness. (Matthew 13:7)

³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Paul reminds them, and us, again that we died. We died, and yet we must continue to seek and fill our minds with the things above. If we count ourselves dead to worldliness, separated from it for the purposes of God, then what do we do when we find ourselves focused on it again? We immediately remind our self that that is our old nature. We intentionally shift our focus back on to what is true of our new nature. We obey this imperative command of the Holy Spirit via the Apostle, and we seek what is above and fill our minds with what is above. (Philippians 4:8)

The Apostle declared that he was crucified with Christ and yet he lives. Still, it was not the old Saul that was living, rather it was Christ in Him! (Galatians 2:20) How we need that kind of believer today! **We need dead men and women, dead to their old nature, but alive in Christ.** Dead men don't argue. They don't demand to have their way. They don't even want to be recognized. They are hidden in Christ in God. They just quietly go about serving the Lord of the universe and affecting lives for eternity. All the recognition goes to their Savior. Hidden in Christ with their mind set on things above, they seek to yield to their Savior in all that they do.

⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Why can we give up everything the world has to offer and die to self? Love is the motivation. God so loved us that He gave His only Son. (1John3:16) How can we offer anything less than complete submission? But there is more. He becomes our life. He means everything to us. We are filled in Him. (2:10)

But there is still more. There is a day coming when He will be revealed to the world. The rest of Psalm 110 will come to pass just as the first half did. The glory of Jesus that has been hidden from the eyes of all but a few will be revealed, unveiled, and faith will become sight. (Psalm 110:5-7) When that day comes, every believer who has the righteousness of God in Christ will also be revealed. (2Corinthians 5:21) All that He is in you will no longer be hidden but will be manifest. All the mockers' and critics' mouths will be stopped. (Psalm 63:11) Because you are in Jesus, you share in that revealing of

Commented [Paul13]: 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Commented [Paul14]: Luke 9:62 (ESV)

⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Commented [Paul15]: Matthew 13:7 (ESV)

⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Commented [Paul16]: Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Commented [Paul17]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Commented [Paul18]: 1 John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Commented [Paul19]: Colossians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Commented [Paul20]: Psalm 110:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶ He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth.

⁷ He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

Commented [Paul21]: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Commented [Paul22]: Psalm 63:11 (ESV)

¹¹ But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

glory. (Song of Songs 8:5^a) He would have it no other way, for when they mocked you, they mocked Him. (Psalm 69:9) When they were critical of you, they were critical of Him, for you were dead and your life was hidden in Him.

Commented [Paul23]: Song of Songs 8:5a (ESV) ⁵ Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

Commented [Paul24]: Psalm 69:9 (ESV)
⁹ For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

Now, let us sum up these four verses as expressed in the Message translation: ¹ *So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides.* ² *Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.* ³ *Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life.* ⁴ *When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.*

Does this life of focus on Jesus and seeking Him describe your life? I remember as a teenager reading a passage of Scripture and realizing I was not remotely like the description of a believer that it outlined. Every boy there realized they weren't. We stopped and prayed silently and asked God what was missing in our life that we would fall so short of the Bible's description of a believer. I can't put into words what happened. I just know we all had a new awareness of the reality of Jesus. Our hearts were broken because we realized how much He loved us and how pathetic our response to that love really was. Maybe you need a moment like that this morning.

Are you seeking Jesus with your whole heart and mind? Or are you shuffling along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you? Is your mind on things above? What are you missing? Are you responding to His love today? Is the reality of His resurrected life at work in you?

Questions

- 1 What is the basis of these commands?
- 2 Is it a reality in your life?
- 3 What is seeking the world?
- 4 What are the two fundamental differences?
- 5 What are "things above"?
- 6 What are the benefits of seeking them?
- 7 What's the connection with Psalm 110?
- 8 What is the hidden life?
- 9 When will it be revealed?
- 10 Are you content with obscurity?