

## Colossians (5): Holy living, extraordinary testimony (3:1-17)

Colossians 3:1-17 <sup>1</sup>If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup>For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your<sup>[a]</sup> life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup>Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:<sup>[b]</sup> sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>On account of these the wrath of God is coming.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>7</sup>In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup>But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self<sup>[d]</sup> with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup>Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave,<sup>[e]</sup> free; but Christ is all, and in all.

<sup>12</sup>Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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.

### Introduction

Peace be with you all. Although now we cannot worship together in the church location physically, we know that Jesus Christ is in the midst when we worship together from different places, because God is omnipresent, who is everywhere. Brothers and sisters, please put down the things which may be a distract to you for the worship, separate out this Morning of the Lord's day, focus on worshiping our Lord. Wholehearted worship will renew our strength in our Lord.

Today we will continue the series of Colossians. Today it is the fifth sermon, Colossians chapter three. We spent a large portion of our time last week to review the previous sermons so, I will not repeat today. If there is a need, you may go to our church's website to check out last week's sermon.

We still take the similar approach to study today. First, we will organize and meditate on the scripture, then, try to apply them into the current situation. Let's bow our head and pray.

一、 Seek the things that are above (3:1-4)

1. Though we won't review the scripture from the first chapter, in order to better understand today's message, we need to pick up from the end of the last week's sermon, chapter 2:13-23. Verse 8-12 and Verse 13-23 deal with two levels of the heresy's concept: Verse 8-12 deals with its ideology, in Christ, human tradition, elemental spirits of the world, the Pantheism are broken away, as well as the tradition of the circumcision. Verse 13-23 deals with the religious regulations. Paul respond to the heresy Colossian church faces with that Jesus is the head of all and source of the fullness. Here, Paul further applied this general principle of faith into the religious regulations, and teaches that the center of Christian belief is not "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch", but died, buried and resurrected with our Lord.

2. Paul's thought were interrelated and logical. When he finished the argument that we were freed from all kinds of religious regulations, he immediately started the chapter three to talk about the mode of a holy life. Just like my professor always says, Christian's freedom is not only being liberated from the bondage of the law, death and sin, but also being liberated for a holy and joyful living. Here, we need to focus on Verse 1, "If then you have been raised with Christ." It uses the present perfect tense. Since Christians have died and raised with Jesus our Lord, then our eyes need to be put on the things above and seek the things that are above. But please notice that "seek the things that are above" does not mean that Christians stay away from this world, but in contrary, like we said the last week, we should live a life in our Lord from four dimensions, to yourself, to others, outward, and upward. Such life also echoes with Paul's compliment to the Colossian church for their faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that they have for all the saints, for the hope laid up for them in heaven.

3. Therefore, "seek the things that are above" is a vision, a choice to respond to every situation in our lives, no matter big or small, with the attitude of "Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God." What is the attitude of "Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God?" Actually, this is another expression of "Jesus Christ is Lord." Psalm 110:1 [The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."] Lord Jesus used this verse to rebut Pharisees' question about his identity in Matthew 22:44-45. Christ is the Lord of David and Son of David at the same time, how could that be? Because Jesus Christ is 100% God and 100% human. Resurrected Jesus sits at the right hand of God, praying for us and sovereign over all things. Paul exhorted us to seek the things that are above, which means that we should live as "Jesus is Lord" to face the people and things in this world.

4. As you can see, the general theme of Colossians is "Christ is the Lord". From the first chapter, Paul started with Christ is the head of salvation, to the Lord of all, the head of the church, and my savior. Then in second chapter, Christ is God's mystery, we are ambassadors of the mystery. Then back to our theme last week, Christ is the source of abundant life, and in Him, believers do not seek additional sources, are no longer governed by various

ideologies and religious regulations, and are truly free. With today's message, "Christ is the Lord" becomes our worldview and guides our daily living. From thought to living out, from receiving salvation to living out salvation, from understanding the work of Christ in the world, in the church, to understanding the work of Christ in my life, this is the progress from chapters 1 to 3 of Colossians.

## 二、Put off the old-self and put on new-self (3:5-14)

1. We spent a lot of time in the first few verses, because these verses form the basis of the entire following paragraph. Preaching is different from Sunday school. In Sunday school we try to explain each verse in detail, but in preaching, we have to choose some and skip others. In today's message, I will focus on the first four verses and the last four verses, because the first four verses are the basis of the entire passage, and the last four verses can become an encouragement and reminder for everyone in current pandemic. But we still have to explain the large section in the middle, which is verses 5-14.

2. To understand verses 5-14, you can use a theme to run through the verses: the contrast between the old and the new. However, it should be noted that the "old and new" here do not mean the old and new testament, but the old self and new self. The Old Testament festivals, sacrificial ceremonies, temples, etc. were established by God and there are spiritual meanings to point to Christ, which is good in itself. But in 3: 9 says that the old self is not a good thing, it refers to the old self before we know the Lord, full of evil passions, greed and filthiness. So please don't confuse the Old Testament with the old self.

3. So, the entire passage of v5-14 is a comparison between the old and the new self. "Christ is the Lord" becomes our worldview, guiding our daily living, we can put off the old self and put on the new self. A great mystery in the Christian life is that we live in a tension between two kingdoms. The Kingdom of God has come, but it has not yet been fully revealed. The church is the bride of Christ, we have been engaged to Christ, but the wedding feast has not yet been held. The Christian life is a journey towards heaven. We have started, but we have not reached the end yet. The reason we just used the three biblical concepts of the kingdom of God, wedding, and journey to heaven to describe the Christian life is to echo the content of verses 5-14. The reason why Paul wrote this exhortation is because Christians live in the war between the old self and the new self. Therefore, we should continue to put off the old self and put on the new self in the Lord.

4. I think that the best translation in the entire passage of v5-14 is the "is being" in verse 10: **and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.** This "is being" translates the original "ongoing present" expressively. The Christian life is being continuously renewed, so that it will return to the original image who God created.

### 三、Christ is my Lord and peace of Christ rule in my hearts (3:15-17)

1. How can we reach that? You cannot rely on meditation, on following the dietary laws, festivals, and Sabbath. It is not pursuing a mysterious experience, but continuously **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly**. Verse 15-17 is Paul's prescription for the church, teaching the church how to live out a holy life and extraordinary testimony.

2. In these three short verses, Paul pointed out three very important guidelines for life, which are well worth pondering:

1) In your hearts: in just a few verses, Paul used “in your hearts” three times. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in your hearts richly; with thankfulness in your hearts to God. As mentioned last Sunday, observing the religious regulations will bring two bad consequences: despair or pride. Paul knew that external regulations could not bring real change. The real change comes from the heart.

2) Word of Christ: there is an idiom called “ears linger eyes tint”, which means that we will be easily affected by our living environment and influenced by what we see and hear constantly. In short, we are what we are filled with. Paul knew that the secret of a holy life is to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” does not mean to listen to the sermons all the time. Paul knew the importance of holistic education, so he specifically said “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom”. This echoes 1:28-29. In 1:28-29, we proclaim Him with all wisdom; here in 3:16, we receive the word of Christ also with all wisdom. It's important to listen to sermons for sure, but it's only one aspect of all wisdom. Music, videos, arts, events, there are endless ways to let the word of Christ dwell in our hearts. In addition, there is an “one another” concept in v16, but it was not translated obviously in Chinese version. Learning the word of Christ is two-ways, one another, and it occurs naturally in the faith community. Now because of the pandemic, we can't meet in person, but through the internet, text, or video chat, we can still encourage and build up one another in God's word.

3) Giving thanks: Throughout the book of Colossians, “giving thanks” is a concept that keeps appearing. In the first chapter, Paul encouraged the church to bear fruits in four aspects. The last one is giving thanks (1:12). 2:6-7 is the key section of the entire book,

Paul also mentioned building in four aspects. The last one is also thanksgiving (abounding in thanksgiving). In these three verses of 3: 15-17, giving thanks appear three times in a row: (v15) be thankful, (v16) with thankfulness in your hearts, (17) giving thanks to God. Why is giving thanks so important? Because giving thanks is the inevitable result of the life in Christ as Lord, it can't be pretended. Gratitude comes from knowing the Lord intimately as the one created heaven and earth and all in it, who not only created, but still sustains all things and upholds the universe to this day. The Lord predestined a group of people, shed His precious blood for their sins and resurrected to give us a living hope. Our Lord continues to work in our life today, so that we are constantly being renewed, more and more like Jesus. Paul believes that the believers who truly know this truth will not lack gratitude in his life.

3. In your hearts, the word of Christ, giving thanks. "In your hearts" is a position, indicating that the real change of life comes from the heart; "the word of Christ" is the content, indicating that the real change of life is due to the word of the Lord, not by one's merit; giving thanks is the fruit, the inevitable result of life change. May we, in the midst of this pandemic, focus on the merciful Lord, being filled with His word, and renew our strength.