

Centrality of the Son: A Study of Colossians

Attractive Obedience

Colossians 3:1-11

Attraction of the Son

3:1-4

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

In Plato's famous parable of the cave, centuries before Paul, shadows on the wall merely reflected the real world above. Many people by Paul's day believed that the heavenly realms were pure and eternal, in contrast to the temporal and perishable world below. Jewish apocalyptic writers also distinguished between the heavenly and earthly realms, emphasizing the purity of God's realm in the upper heavens.

The Jewish mystics creating problems at Colossae were probably seeking these upper realms through mystical experiences (2:18), but Paul only mentions one thing specifically in heaven: Christ. In the context, he includes heavenly values centered around Christ, available because those who died and rose with Christ were also exalted with him (cf. Eph 2:6). The phrase "heavenly matters" was sometimes used this way.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

"Set your heart on things above" - The term implies more than a way of thinking; it includes values and loves as well. It could well be translated "delight in things above." In contrast with this second command, which speaks of values, the first command refers to desires. Since basic desires proceed from the heart (Jesus' words in Mark 7:15), the NIV correctly inserts the word "heart." The first concern is moral; the second, mental.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Paul was not enjoining an other-world asceticism; he had just condemned that (2:20-23). He was saying that life *in this world* will be better if it is lived by a power *beyond this world*, the power of the resurrected, ascended, glorified Christ. The "earthly things" (*ta epi tēs gēs*, lit., "things upon the earth," 3:2; the same Gr. words are used in v. 5) to be avoided are moral, not physical (cf. immorality, impurity, lust, etc., in v. 5). Paul was not encouraging a kind of Gnostic disdain for material things. Every physical thing God created, including the body and sex, is good (cf. Gen. 1:27-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-4). However, since having a physical body does give occasion for the works of the (moral) flesh (cf. Rom. 7:4-6), Paul warned against setting one's affections in this area and perverting God's purpose for them.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come [e] upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Colossians 3:5-11

The expression *sons of disobedience* is a Semitic idiom that means "people characterized by disobedience."

The NET Bible

Put off all such things. The commands in vv. 8–9 are based on two reasons given in vv. 9–10— reasons which are expressed in terms of a metaphor about clothing oneself. Paul says that they have put off the old man and have put on the new man. Two things need to be discussed in reference to Paul's statement. (1) What is the meaning of the clothing imagery (i.e., the "*have put off*" and "*have been clothed*")? (2) What is the meaning of the *old man* and the *new man*? Though some commentators understand the participles "*have put off*" (v. 9) and "*have been clothed*" (v. 10) as imperatives (i.e., "put off!" and "put on!"), this use of participles is extremely rare in the NT and thus unlikely here. It is better to take them as having the semantic force of indicatives, and thus they give an explanation of what had happened to the Colossians at the time of their conversion—they had taken off the *old man* and put on the *new* when they trusted in Christ (cf. 1:4). While it is difficult to say for certain what the background to Paul's "clothing" metaphor might be (whether it is primarily Jewish and comes from the OT, or primarily Gentile and comes from some facet of the Greco-Roman religious milieu), it is nonetheless clear, on the basis of Paul's usage of the expression, that the *old man* refers to man as he is in Adam and dominated by sin (cf. Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22), while the *new man* refers to the Christian whose new sphere of existence is in Christ. Though the metaphor of clothing oneself primarily reflects outward actions, there is a distinct inward aspect to it, as the rest of v. 10 indicates: *being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it*. Paul's point, then, is that Christians should take off their dirty clothing (inappropriate behavior) and put on clean clothing (behavior consistent with knowing Christ) because this has already been accomplished in a positional sense at the time of their conversion (cf. Gal 3:27 with Rom 13:14).

The NET Bible

But one puts to death the sinful lifestyle by depending on one's finished death in Christ (3:3-4), not by harsh treatment of the physical body (2:18, 20-23). The sins Paul lists here are typical sins Gentile converts to Judaism would have committed before their conversion.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

Our attraction to Christ compels us to want to live how He lived.

Q1. Why are people not attracted to Christ?

Q2. What are areas of your life are not reflective of your love for Christ?