

Colossians - Part 4

by Paris Reidhead

The true Christian life comes from the presence of Christ in our lives and we are sharers with Christ in his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

Duration: 43:16

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:4, Romans 6:6, Colossians 2:12, Colossians 2:20 - 3:3

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking and understanding the implications of our relationship with God. He uses the example of people being assigned jobs in a new administration to illustrate that our role in the relationship with God is not just about collecting rewards, but about understanding our responsibilities and privileges. The speaker also highlights the need to set our affection on things above, rather than being consumed by worldly interests. He explains that our thoughts ultimately shape our emotions and actions, and encourages the audience to focus their attention on heavenly things.

Transcript

This last, I had brought the third of three studies on the epistle to the Colossians, and we will continue with that, though I know many of you were not here, and probably some who were have forgotten the import of Colossians as we were seeing it. Still, we will go to the third chapter of Colossians, which constitutes the fourth message in this series. The letter to the Colossians was written by Paul to deal with a problem that had occurred in that church.

The church in Colossae was one of three that were quite close together up in what we now call Turkey, and very close to that river that we've come to use as a word in our vocabulary. The Meander River has given us the word to meander here and there, to just sort of wander around. And there were three little towns, Heriopolis and Colossae, and the third town just across from Heriopolis constituted this little group of churches that was going to be Paul's concern.

He never visited them, he never saw them. As far as we know, at no time did he go there. He had been in what we now call Turkey and Asia Minor on many times, but not visiting the church at Colossae.

But he was tremendously concerned about the problems that had occurred there. There were probably Jewish heretics, some who had become apostate to Moses, had absorbed the philosophy that had been promulgated from Plato's school in Athens and had penetrated through that entire area, along with the

Greek language. And it was basically that all matter is bad.

It goes back to the oriental mystery religions of the east, and apparently Plato, while he'd been in Egypt, had absorbed these and brought them back and attached them to Socrates to give it authority, and he had developed his concept that matter in its essence is evil. That God originally created spirit, and that when man has spirit sin, then God condemned him to a prison, and the prison was a body and created matter to sustain that prison experience. And therefore, essentially, matter was bad and only spirit was good.

And this was being given throughout the schools of the day and of the time, but particularly affecting the church at Colossae because of this group of heretical Jews that were active in the area and found in these who'd been converted from rather vile, indeed vile, lives of idolatry through the preaching of the gospel, that they were probably going to need to have something in addition to the gospel. That was their thinking. And so we thought, here's a field, these are right.

And so they began to subtly try to seduce these Christians in these three little churches, trying to get them to recognize that where they had problems, even though they were converted, even though they had been pardoned and the past had been forgiven, they were still having problems with temptation. They had appetites and urges and drives, and they were tempted to do some of the things they'd done prior to their conversion to Christ. And so the implications were, well, the death of Christ was sufficient to save you from the penalty of what you had done before you met him.

But now that you're a Christian, you have to have something more than the work of Christ. And that something more would consist in your bowing to angels and asking angels to assist and your worshipping. It meant circumcision.

It meant observing all of the fasts and the feasts. It meant asceticism. And so they brought in to adulterate the gospel all of the background of Judaism, plus much of the pagan asceticism that was there.

And so the consequence was that this was beginning to penetrate the church, not deeply, but enough so that it was brought to the attention of Paul, and he immediately wrote this letter to correct the problem. He wanted them to understand just exactly what the difficulties were, and that we needed nothing more than the perfect finished work of Christ. And so in this third chapter, we find the apostle describing the true Christian life.

And the first verses actually establish a contrast to the teachings of the heiress. The first thing he makes clear is that there is no salvation in antipathy or disgust or repulsion toward conduct of others or of oneself. Just one's attitude of antipathy toward all the evil that had characterized their past life is not to be thought of as salvation.

Repulsion never lifts one. One may be thoroughly incensed by what they see, but it remains quite as they are. Then the second is that ceremonial purifications and bodily austerities do not bring true holiness.

One could indeed do as is done in India, where people will stare at the sun until they're blind or lie upon bed of spikes or walk on beds of gold. And in the abnegation of the flesh and the austerities of the physical life, they're not producing true holiness. The third point is that aversion to physical life, that is the teaching in the second chapter that we saw, touch not, taste not, handle not, or reducing and harassing physical life, is a false and a mischievous system that does not produce true holiness.

True Christian character is delineated by the presence of Christ in the life, so inwardly changing one that they can live and walk and move, have their being in the midst of all of that that's corrupt, and themselves be separate from it, not because of the austerities they impose, but because of the life within them. And so what he wants them to understand that what is being presented in the gospel and by Christ is not a system of austerities and of asceticism, but it's a relationship to a person. You see, you don't illuminate a room because you curse the darkness, but because you light a candle and it's that marvelous infusion of divine life that enables one to dispel the darkness around them.

So there's a contrast to what the heires have been teaching. He wants them to realize that this mystical ceremonial ascetic ideal can do nothing for them other than just further burden them and weigh them down. In combating this asceticism teaching, he affirms that we are sharers with Christ in his death.

That's the impact of the second chapter, that the Lord Jesus not only died for you in the sense of there as your substitute, satisfying the law, vindicating the holiness of God, but he died as you. In order for his death to be effective for you, he had to identify himself so completely with you that when the Father saw him, it was you that he saw. Because the scripture had been so clear throughout the Old Testament, the soul that sinneth, it shall surely die.

You can't visit the sins of the Father unto the children. You can't punish the children for the crimes of the parents. And so, in that sense, one dying for all would have been an impossibility, because the soul that sinneth, it shall surely die.

And what meant this? Why, simply, that since the one who was to die was God, a God who became man and lived under his law, a sinless life, a holy life, when he, this God-man, was to identify himself with sinners, reach out, as it were, and draw them to himself. Because he is infinite in his holiness, even though he's perfectly man, he can identify with an infinite number of sinners. There isn't any limit to the number of people with whom the Lord Jesus could make that identification.

Because of the fact that the infinite nature of his holiness and his righteousness, his reaching out to identify with sinners would be adequate so that he could perfectly identify with every sinner that has lived. And it has been said that had there been as many worlds of sinners as there have been sinners in the world, the death of Christ still would have been adequate, because of who he is. Because he's infinitely holy God, who's become man, with no dilution of his deity.

And therefore, having clothed himself with his humanity, having submitted to the law, having perfectly kept it, then to reach out for a sinner, any sinner, to die for that one, it would give the surplus of his holiness was so infinite that he could represent an infinite number, an unlimited number of sinners. Because of who he is. So said the apostle, the Lord Jesus not only died for you, but he died as you.

And therefore, when you see the Lord Jesus on the cross, you ought to see not only yourself, and see him dying for you, but see him dying as you. And all of us could do that. And all who trusted in Christ through the ages can do that.

And there's still abundant left over in the nature of the Lord Jesus for all who will follow us. And that's the marvel of who he is. Because he is very God, who's become very man, that he might redeem us.

And so he was crucified for you indeed, but knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, and buried with him, and quickened with him, and raised with him, and seated in him. And in that identification is the

completeness of our salvation, so we don't need asceticism. That's the argument of Paul.

Because of who the Lord Jesus is, then you don't need all these other things. And you refute them on the basis of the amplitude of the character and the work of the Son of God. That's the message of Colossians.

He proceeds on the fact that we are sharers with Christ in his death, in his burial, in his resurrection, and in his ascension. So that brings us then to the 2nd chapter, the 3rd chapter rather. And I want you to see this hidden life, not an ascetic life, but a hidden life.

And if it's in this relationship to him that we have this truly marvelous deliverance that's ours. You see the first word I'm using, the King James, with the old argument, you know, if it was good enough for Paul, it's good enough for me. I realize that many of you have other versions, and it won't begin with if.

But mine does. It says, if you then be risen with Christ, or more literally, since you then be risen with Christ. See, that's the argument of the 2nd chapter.

We are crucified with him and buried with him. Now since, what I'm about to explain to you is based on your history. Isn't that wonderful? As I meet you today, I'm certain that your lives today are based on your history.

You are here in consonant with your history. I see some of you, whom I happen to know, are married. Now the reason you're sitting side by side and you're here at the class together is that there was a historical point somewhere back there where you said, I do, and you meant it, and here you remain.

And your history has affected your life until the present. Alright? So there's a historical event in every Christian's life. What is it? That you were crucified.

Well, when were you crucified? Well, you were crucified the day Christ was crucified. You see, the day he died for you, he died as you. And since he died as you, then that means you died with him.

Now that's history. That's history. You say, well, I don't feel it.

Well, you don't even feel that he died for you. So don't let feelings enter into this particular thing. How many of you feel he died for you? Well, it's not a question of whether you feel he died for you.

You know that he died for you. You know that he died for you. Alright? So if you know he died for you, then you know he died as you, and if you know he died as you, then you know you died with him.

When did you die? The day Christ died. That's the history. When were you buried? The day he was buried.

When were you quickened? The day he was quickened. When were you raised? The day he was raised. Because what he was doing for you, he was doing as you, and therefore, that's part of your history.

Now he says, if you don't understand your history, you're not going to understand what I'm saying to you. You've got to get clear about your history. If I were to say to you today, are you married? And you'd look at me with a quizzical look, and you'd say, I don't know.

Let's see. I know we're a ring. That's one evidence.

And I don't have a marriage license. You see, what you would be doing would be confusing your state of consciousness with the factual evidence. As far as I'm concerned, in talking to you, and I ask you if you're married, I'm not asking you for proof.

I'm asking you to give me your state of consciousness. What is your state of consciousness? Well, your answer is going to be yes or no, as the case may be. It's going to be clear.

It's going to be incisive. You're certain about that. Your history is before you, and you know you're up to date.

If I say, are you crucified with Christ? Can you be equally certain? Can you say yes? Can you say, I'm buried with him? I'm quickened with him? I'm raised with him. Well, that's what the Apostle is saying to these people. He's trying to drill into them and just build into them the fact this is part of your history.

And we've got to face the present and the future on the past. So, since you then be risen with Christ, since this is historically fixed and settled, since you're risen with Christ, something has to happen. And it's in this that he is trying to say to them and to us, identification with Christ is not just a nice teaching that makes three good pages in a notebook.

It is the basis of our entire Christian conduct. But since I'm risen, only one word. There's a law of logic that if you use one element of an established, known, and recognized series, all elements are also there by implication.

And if you'd say marriage, for instance, they are married, you're using one element. But there had to be acquaintance. They had to meet each other sometime.

And there had to be a request. There had to be an engagement some period of time. And there had to be a ceremony.

So when you say married or married, all these other elements are implied. They're fixed parts of the whole. And you don't need to debate them or argue them.

They just come along. They're part of it. So when it says risen, it also carries with it crucified with Christ and buried with Christ and quickened with Christ.

That's there. Hence, on the other side, seated with Christ. They're all there because you've taken one element of a known series.

Now, he could have put the others in. We put them in so that we can complete the picture. But by implication, they are present.

Since you then have in your history a day when you were crucified, a day when you were buried, and when you were quickened, and when you were raised, since this is part of your past, what are you going to do about it? How is it going to affect you? Well, he said, seek those things which are above. You can't sustain yourself on abstract laws or great universal ideas or formulas or generalizations. And thus the concept that you're crucified and buried and quickened and raised is splendid.

But there have to be implications. When people get married, they don't come to the church door and look at one another and say, it's been very nice knowing you. I hope we meet again.

And she goes north and he goes south. That's not the implications of marriage. At least not right then.

And they're getting now in our society where for half the people, as sooner or later it gets to that, but not at the church door. And it's not intended to be that way. No, what do they do? They seek the implications of the ceremony.

The ceremony was there to publicly declare an inward commitment that each made to the other. And now they seek to understand the implications of the relationship. Isn't that what he's saying? Since you have this history, seek to understand and experience the implications of the relationship.

Seek those things which are above. To understand the meaning, the significance, the responsibilities, and the privileges of the relationship. Just as much as you would if you were... We had an election since I saw you.

And there will be another administration coming into Washington on the 20th of January. And people will be given jobs. We've been reading about the plum list.

Some 4,000 jobs of people that will be coming in. The function of someone assigned to a task is not just to collect a check monthly or bi-monthly as the case may be, or by every couple of weeks. I don't know.

How does the government pay? I've never been privileged to be involved with that. But however they do, there's more to the job than just getting a check. Like the time when Calvin Coolidge was here and the Secretary of the Treasurer thought he would impress this New Englander.

And so he said, I'll deliver Mr. Coolidge's check myself today. And so Mr. Coolidge, with his reputation for being very frugal with speech and fast to turn, received him and he said, well, thank you, Mr. Secretary, and took the check and put it on the desk. And the Treasurer said, well, is that all you have to say? He said, no, come again.

So there's more to being in the office than just collecting the check. There are responsibilities in it that have to be followed and carried. That's what he's saying.

There are privileges that are there. Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Your relationship with Him has brought you now into a new privilege.

You see, you're not only crucified with Him to have victory over yourself, you're buried with Him to have victory over the world, but you are also seated in Him and thus with Him in the heavenly. Now, seek the implications of this relationship. Seek those things which are above.

Seek to understand them. Seek to appropriate them. Mind them.

Think about them. As workmen and tradesmen and citizens, our aims terminate with the things upon the earth. But, as Christians, we are to seek those high and holy privileges and opportunities and responsibilities that are ours.

Oh, you say, what are they? What are these responsibilities and privileges? Well, let's go to Revelation in our thinking. You needn't turn. Unto Him who loved us and washed us in His blood and made us to be kings and priests.

He didn't ask us if we wanted to be. He made us to be kings and priests. Why? Why? Because we are seated with Him.

We know that when Caesar ruled the world, he didn't rule it all personally. He was the king, but he was the king of kings. And he had many who were given areas to rule, and it was King Herod who was the king, if you please, but he was responsible to Caesar.

He was the king of King Herod. So what does this mean? What does this imply? Well, it implies authority and responsibility for government. And we're to understand the implications of what it means to be made a king.

One of the most difficult things for an admitted president coming in to the office of the presidency, so I'm told by those who have far greater knowledge of it than I, is to understand the enormous power of the office and to separate the individual's sense of his own worth with the tremendous power that the people have placed upon him. And it's very difficult, and so he has to seek to understand the implications and responsibilities of being a president, and to be presidential at all times, and to exercise... So he said here, if you've been crucified with Christ, and buried with him, and quickened with him, and raised with him, and seated with him, for pity's sakes, care enough to find out what are the privileges and the responsibilities of the relationship. You see? He's saying, listen, these people are trying to get you to go down here, and not to eat, and not to drink, and not to do this, and not to go there and sleep on beds of spite.

They've missed the point. This isn't what it's all about. It's a relationship with a person and responsibilities that that person has given you.

These other things are inconsequential. Seek those things which are above. For Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

So he's saying that the antidote to heresy is to understand the high and the holy privileges that are ours in our relationship with Christ. Anybody that has succumbed to heresy, you know, has a very low view both of Christ and of himself and his relationship to Christ. Otherwise, he's not going to be even a candidate for heresy.

He's so excited and thrilled about what he has in Christ, that he just doesn't have time for the other nonsense. And so he's saying the best way to handle this is for you to set your affection on things above. You are to want.

One is to seek that purpose, and the other is to want. It's amazing how those two things go together. They still do it, you know.

When I was a boy, we had the Prairie Farmer's Bible. You know what it is, don't you? The Sears and Roebuck or the Montgomery Ward Catalog. They tell about the preacher in Minnesota that went to call and the family weren't very regular at church, and so the mother wanted to impress the preacher and said to the little child, Honey, please go in the other room and bring us the book we love so well.

And came out with the Sears and Roebuck Catalog. Well, they give you that. You know, if you had to buy a book that had that much technical information in it, and tables and so on, when you were in college, you wouldn't finish paying for it until you got your Social Security check.

That would be very expensive. But they give it to you for a postcard of request. Why? Because they know about that book.

They know that if you just keep looking and get acquainted with what's there, the first thing you're going to find out, something in that book leaps up and hits you. And then you're going to set your affection. So if they can get you to think about it, they're going to get you to want it.

Now, nobody buys something because they see it. They only buy it because they want it. But they wouldn't want it if they didn't see it.

So the first thing you've got to do is get them to seek and then find out what's there. And the second thing you've got to do is to get them to want what's there. So he said, seek and get acquainted with the things that are above, and then set your affection on things above.

Start wanting what you ought to want. You say, well, my emotions, my desires aren't under my control of my will. Of course, I agree.

You know what they are under? They're under the control of your mind. I don't know who put this here, but it's here for a purpose, so I'll use it. Every experience in life has three elements to it.

The mental, the emotional, you can tell I'm a great blackboard writer, can't you? I specialize in it. And the volitional. Now, I'm just sorry about you folks back here who can't see my beautiful triangle.

The direction is always from the mental to the emotional to the volitional. Always in that flow. It's always from the thought to the emotions to the will.

Never the other way. Your mind does not control your will. If I say to you now, on the count of three, I want all of you to be angry.

All right? One, two, three. Be angry. And you laugh as you're doing some of your things.

Why? Because you know that's not how the human person functions. If I want you to be angry, I'm not going to command you to be angry. I'm going to do what Mark Antony did in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in the general oration when he said, I've not come to praise Caesar, but to bury him.

But then he proceeded to say the thing that made the citizens think. And as the result of his causing them to think, they began to feel. And then they decided to go and tear down the house of Brutus.

Because Shakespeare was a great psychologist. He understands how we function. So what does he say? See, get acquainted with the things that are above until you want the things that are above.

Set your affection on things above. But how do you do that? Because you set your attention on the things that are above. You tell me what you think about, and I'll tell you what you feel about.

I was in a church years ago for a Bible conference. And I was staying in a home. It was a very lovely home.

But the family wasn't terribly interested. Oh, they'd come. One of them would come every night to sort of keep the family reputation up.

But they weren't very interested. And in all the meals, there was no conversation about the things we'd been talking about. I looked out one day and saw a pond in the backyard.

And then I saw a flotilla of ducks going across the pond. And I said, Oh, are those ducks? Oh, yes. Are you interested in ducks? And I made a mistake.

I said, Yes, because I'm basically interested in anything anybody's interested in. Well, for 45 minutes, I learned more about ducks than I ever knew was. And I know 250% more than I ever wanted to know, because I had tripped the trigger of interest.

They were interested in ducks. You see, they'd set their affection on things on the water. They loved that.

And so while they could spill over about ducks, but they hadn't any interest at all on things that are above. And so the Apostle said, Seek, set your attention, your mind, to find out what is implied in your being in Christ. And then set your affection.

How? What you think about is what you want. That's how it works. That's how it works.

Then he proceeds, and we have to conclude where he proceeds. Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth. Therefore, whenever you find a therefore in the scripture, you ought to find out what it's there for.

And this is a very good place, because this therefore says, You have now become so excited and so thrilled about the things that are above. Where Christ sits on the right hand of God. And you want what you've learned about, and now you've got some problems.

And so you're conditioned to get rid of the problems that are going to stand in the way of your realizing all the wonderful things you want. That's when you deal with separation. That's when you deal with these problems.

When people really want to get rid of them. Why? Because they're bad? Well, they knew they were bad while they had them. They didn't get rid of them.

People don't get rid of things because they're bad. They get rid of things because they stand in the way of what they want. You see? See the beautiful psychology of what the Apostle was saying? He hasn't even talked about their problems until he talks about the glorious privileges that are theirs in their relationship with Christ.

And then he's saying, Now here's some things that are going to hold you down. These are lead weights. And we'd better take care of those things.

But the other people come around, and they don't have anything above, so what do they focus on? They focus on circumcision, and they focus on what you eat, and what day, and where you go, and angels, and it's all down below. And the Apostle said, Hey, that's not how you do it. You find out what's yours in Christ, and then you get so excited that you're going to deal with anything that stands in the way.

So he says, Mortify. Put it to death. Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and idolatry, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Deal with them. Why? Because they're interfering with what you've seen above, and what you want above, in these high, holy, marvelous privileges of relationship with Christ. And you can't afford them because they're going to cost too much.

But you people don't deal with these things because they're wrong. They only deal with them because they are interfering with what they want. What they want.

And when people want the right thing, then they're candidates to deal with everything that isn't right. Because nothing has meaning or value. You know, when you once find a field with a pearl of great price, it's not hard to sell all you have to go buy it.

Because you found something worthwhile. But somebody comes and tries to get you to sell it before you found that field with a pearl of great price. It's pretty tough going.

And somebody says, don't do this because it's wrong, and don't do that because it's wrong. Yeah, but who doesn't have something that's wrong? I'm no worse than the rest of them, and a hundred different excuses. But friend, when you find out what there is in our relationship to Christ, then all of a sudden, I'm not going to allow any weight to hold me down.

From what I see there, for the privileges and the responsibilities and the opportunities that are mine in Christ. Well, I thought I was going to get you clear down to the 17th verse, and I didn't do it. Just to the 5th.

But somebody's going to make a mistake and invite me back again, and we'll carry on from there. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this time together, and we ask thy blessing now upon these thy people.

And we pray that somehow, this week, we'll set our affection on things above because we seek those things which are above. In Jesus' name, and for his sake and for our own sake, we ask it. Amen.

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