

Psalm 51

This morning we were talking about the flesh and the Spirit from Romans 8.

Our journey through the Heidelberg Catechism brings us to a similar subject tonight.

88. Q. What is the true repentance or conversion of man?

A. It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.

This is precisely what Paul speaks of in Colossians 3.

I should point out that the language of “conversion”
is very much the language of repentance – it is a turning.

And Paul talks about this in terms of dying and rising with Christ.

If then you were raised with Christ,

seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

If we have received new life in Christ,

then our priorities will be different.

Since you have died with Christ,

therefore Paul insists that you also have died to sin,

that you also have been set free from the restrictions of the Law,

that you also have made alive with Christ.

Since this is true, Paul declares:

you are no longer to live in the way you used to.

Your whole perspective on life should change,

because you are no longer the old sinner that you used to be.

The Christian life is not based on our experience or our feelings,

but it is based upon what Christ has accomplished.

The imperatives of the Christian life

--the command to seek those things which are above, for instance--

are rooted in the new reality of who we are in Christ.

Since you have been united to Christ,

live like it!

Or to put it simply:

Be who you are in Christ!

In verse two Paul contrasts setting your mind on things above
with setting your mind on things on the earth.

The Christian must not be earthly-minded.

We must not allow ourselves to be focused on the things of this world,
but rather we must be centered on the things of Christ.

Some people have taken this the wrong way.

Some people think that this means
that we should completely ignore the affairs of daily life.

Such people become "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good."

But they have misunderstood what it means to seek those things which are above.

Paul is going to spend the rest of the chapter talking about
how to relate to one another in the church, at home, and at work,
so obviously he is not telling us to ignore everyday life.

So what does it mean to "set your minds on things above"?

It means that in the midst of your daily routine,
your heart and mind are constantly focused on Christ.

It means that you find your identity and purpose in Christ,
and not in the rat-race of life.

It means that when your kids are driving you nuts,
you find rest in Christ;
when your husband is blowing a fuse,
you understand that God's grace is sufficient for you;
when your co-workers are sniping at you behind your back,
your heart finds contentment in Christ's promises.

But what are these "things above"?

What are you to set your heart and mind on?

Paul says that these things are where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Well, where is the right hand of God?

Heaven.

Okay, what is heaven?

God says in Is. 66:1

"Heaven is my throne,
and earth is my footstool."

So heaven is where God resides,
and earth is merely a place for his feet.

Or as the Psalmist says in Psalm 11

"The Lord is in his holy temple,
The Lord's throne is in heaven"

Solomon, in I Kgs. 8:27, recognized this when he built the temple:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth?"

Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you.
How much less this temple which I have built!"

When we are told to set our minds on things above,
we are being told to orient ourselves to the way things really are.

Heaven is the center of the universe--because that is where God dwells.
If our lives are to give glory to God,
then our lives must be centered on heaven as well.
Heaven is the most important place in your life.

Why?

Because Heaven is where the most important decisions in the universe are made:
Heaven is where God's judgment is proclaimed
Heaven is where God decides whether to have mercy or not.
Heaven is where the immortal, invisible, only wise God determines the path of history.

But there is another reason.
Heaven is where our Lord Jesus Christ is.
It is in heaven that your Savior has sat down at the right hand of the Father,
and you have been made complete in HIM.
Therefore, your identity,
your purpose in life,
your whole future,
is found in heaven.

And so,
setting your mind on things above
means that you renounce the idolatries of your heart,
forsaking the pleasures of sin
for the glories of knowing Christ and him crucified

--because you too have died.
This is not just a figure of speech.
This is not something future.
This has already happened.

You are dead.
Just as truly as Christ died on the cross,
so also those who are united to him have died to sin.
Remember the three circles...

Your basic identity--your heart--your life--who you are
has changed.
The old self died with Christ,
And your life is now hidden with Christ in God.
And when Christ appears,
you also will appear with him in glory.

In the light of Paul's teaching, both here and in Romans 8,
questions 89-90 are slightly misleading:

89. Q. What is the dying of the old nature?

90. Q. What is the coming to life of the new nature?

After all, the old nature
(or the old *man* – which is the word used in the original German of the HC)
is already dead.

The dying of the old nature is that I have been crucified with Christ.
The old man – the old nature – is dead.

So it might be better to ask,

89. Q. What is the mortification of the flesh?

A. It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.

This is precisely what Paul says in verses 5-11 of Colossians 3.

*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:
sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.
On account of these the wrath of God is coming.*

Since the old man is dead,
therefore you are to PUT TO DEATH your members which are on the earth.
In other words,
you are to destroy whatever is left over from your old way of life.

Since you have died to sin with Christ,
Therefore, put to death whatever remains of those sinful patterns and idolatries.

Paul warns in verse 6 that the wrath of God is coming precisely because of these things.

But then notice what he says in verse 7:
In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

BUT YOU DON'T LIVE THAT LIFE ANYMORE.

YOU DIED, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God,
And when Christ, who is your life appears, you also will appear with him in glory.

Beloved,
THIS is what Christ has done for you.
Nothing less.
He has forgiven all your sins.

He has washed you clean.
And now he has called you into newness of life--
 placing his own life within you by his Holy Spirit.
Since this is who you are in Christ,
 Act like it!
Christ says that you no longer belong to this world.
 You belong to HIM.

So when those evil desires well up in your heart,
 put them to death.

Verses 5-11 explain who you are.
 You could summarize the whole paragraph by saying,
 you have put off the old man
 you have put on the new man
 therefore get rid of the old man's clothes!

The old man wore the filthy rags of sin. v8-9
 But the old man has been crucified with Christ;
 your old nature was snipped away by the circumcision of Christ.
He is dead,
 so clean out the closet,
 get rid of his stinking clothes,
 and get yourself a new wardrobe!

What are the items which Paul inventories from the old man's closet?
 The clothes which Paul lists in verse 8-9 fit into two categories:
 1. sins of the temper
 Anger--Wrath--Malice
 2. sins of the tongue
 Slander, obscene talk, and lying

These things were your clothing --in the life you once lived,
 but NOW,
 Paul says that you are a different person,
 so you should take these things off,
 and throw them away.

Now that you have a new identity,
 Christ has given you a new wardrobe.
Since Christ has become your life (v4),
 and your identity is found in him,
 that should have some effect on what you look like!
Paul says that you have put off the old man with his deeds,
 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge,
 according to the image him who created him.

In other words:

the old man and his clothing go together.

the new man and his clothing come as a package as well.

It is unthinkable that a Christian should "wear" anger or filthy speech.

Christians are renewed in the image of Christ.

Paul launches into a reminder that this promise is for all of God's people:

for in Christ there is neither Greek, nor Jew,

circumcised, nor uncircumcised,

barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free!

Why?

Because Christ is all and in all!

Christ is the center

--not merely of creation,

but also of redemption,

--nor merely in some abstract, theoretical way,

but also in the nitty, gritty details of your life.

And it is this which Paul immediately turns to in the rest of the chapter:

Since this is who you are in Christ,

therefore,

this is how you ought to live in the church (v12-17)

in your families (v18-21)

and in your work (v22-4:1)

And so I've rewritten the question here:

90. Q. What is the result of our new life in Christ?

A. It is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ, and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

This is what Colossians 3:12-17 is all about.

There are five imperatives in verses 12-17.

Five commands.

“Put on” which is the verb that controls all of verses 12-14

“Let the peace of Christ rule”

“Be thankful”

“Let the word of Christ dwell”

And “do everything in the name of Jesus”

These five imperatives whereby Paul tells you how you should live,
are rooted in the indicative of who you are in Christ.

Since you are the elect of God, holy and beloved, live like it!

Notice these three things that Paul calls the Colossians:

Elect
Holy
Beloved

You are Elect -- chosen by God.

Some people think that to call people "the elect"
makes them proud and haughty.

But when Paul calls the Colossians "the elect" – God's chosen ones
-he says that this ought to provoke them to humility and patience.

Paul also calls you HOLY.

You are set apart in Christ.

In your heart--in the core of your new identity,
you are pure and undefiled,
as holy as Christ--because it is Christ who dwells within you,
purifying you, even as he is pure.

And Paul calls you Beloved.

You are beloved of God.

God has chosen you in Christ;
He has made you holy in Christ;
But he has also made you beloved in Christ.

He has not only elected you from the foundation of the world,
he has also loved you from the foundation of the world.

These two go together!

It is not as though God needed you!
He is HOLY beyond imagining!

God dwells eternally in his own marvelous triune love.

He has no need for you!

But he has set his eternal love upon you.

He has pursued you and wooed you to himself.

As a man loves a maiden and attempts to win her heart with his love,
so God has loved you,

and has set his affection upon you.

Would you spurn his advances?

Would you turn aside the love of the heavenly bridegroom?

Yet every time you sin,
that is exactly what you do.

You who are the elect of God, holy and dearly loved,

you are not to greet your bridegroom wearing the filthy rags of your old nature,
rather you are to put on the beautiful garments which Christ has given you:
tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering
forgiving others as Christ forgave you
Love--the bond which holds the whole package together

You are to live as one who is elect, holy, and beloved of God.
And therefore you are to do good works.

91. Q. But what are good works?

A. Only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the law of God, and to His glory, and not those based on our own opinion or on precepts of men.

This is what Paul lays out for us in the five imperatives of verses 12-17.

1. Verses 12-14 command us to put on this new clothing that is ours in Christ:

*Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,
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.*

Because you are in Christ – because you have put on the new self,
therefore these things are to characterize you.

Too often we are content to live in the old filthy rags of our old self.

But Paul says that as we get rid of these old rags,
we are to put on the clothing of Christ.

As we put off anger and malice,
we are to put on compassion and kindness.

As we put off slander and obscene talk,
we are to put on patience and humility.

You see, it is not enough to stop doing bad things.
We must replace the old patterns of life with new patterns.

In verse 13 Paul says that we must forgive as the Lord has forgiven us.

When your brother sins against you for 47th time,
and he repents and asks you to forgive him,
forgive him, the way the Lord has forgiven you!

You are not allowed to hold grudges.

How often does God have to hear you repent of the same sin?
Even so are you to forgive your brother!

The verb is not repeated in verse 14.

The sentence simply continues,
“above all these, love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

The verb comes from verse 12 –
“put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience...
and above all, love.”

Love binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Love is like the belt or scarf that binds the whole outfit together.

Without love, the rest of the outfit doesn't hold together.

Love is that which makes everything else complete – which brings everything to its fulfillment.

2. Let the Peace of Christ Rule (v 15a)

The second imperative is to let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in one body.

Paul is speaking to a audience well familiar with the Pax Romana – the Peace of Rome.

But he says that it is not the Pax Romana that rules you.

Rather, it is the Pax Christi – the eirene tou Christou – the Peace of Christ,
the Peace of the Messiah,
that shall reign in your hearts.

So what sort of peace rules in your heart?

Are you ruled by what others think of you?

do you seek peace with others at any cost?

Do you find peace in trusting Christ to exercise his sovereign power?

Paul says that the only way to find true peace in the midst of the chaos of life,
is to let your heart be ruled by the Peace of God.

So let the peace of Christ rule your hearts

--a peace which is rooted in recognizing that you all, together,
are called to peace in one body.

Christ has reconciled us as one body to himself;

Now he calls us to allow HIS peace to rule our hearts.

3. And Be Thankful (v15b)

The third imperative is short and to the point:

And be thankful.

This command will run through the following two commands as well.

Indeed, the last two commands could be taken as an exposition of this one!

4. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (v16)

You know how when you first buy a new pair of shoes,

it takes a while for the shoe to grow accustomed to your feet?

But slowly, the shoe takes on the form of your feet.

It's the opposite with our spiritual clothing.

Our spiritual clothing reshapes us!

Since the Word of Christ has renewed you into the image of Christ,

let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,
teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

How does the Word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom?
We need to be steeped in the Word.
In fact, we need to be so steeped in the Word that it overflows in song!
Do you want your life to be transformed by the gospel?
then allow the gospel to reshape you!

I am not going to tell you to have a fifteen minute devotional time each day.
Rather, I am going to tell you that your whole life should be rooted in the Word!
Paul is not saying, "let the Word of Christ have a few minutes of your time"
He is saying, "let the Word of Christ LIVE in you!"
God's Word should permeate every aspect of your life.

Paul says to sing "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs."
In the early church,
they sang mostly psalms from the Book of Psalms.
Very few hymns were written until the fourth century,
when Ambrose of Milan introduced several hymns into his church.
During the Middle Ages congregational singing died out.
All the singing was done by choirs of monks and priests.
At the time of the Reformation,
reformers like Martin Bucer reintroduced congregational singing,
and translated both the Psalms and other Christian hymns
for singing in worship.
They recognized that true Christian piety is rooted in the Word of God,
therefore we should sing God's Word to each other.
We can do this either through singing the Psalms or other biblical passages,
or through singing paraphrases and summaries of biblical teaching.

And as we do, the Word of Christ will continually reshape us into his image.

5. Since Christ is all and is in all, DO all in his name, with a thankful heart!

Since you are the elect of God, holy and beloved,
Since the peace of God is to rule your hearts as one body,
Since the Word of Christ is to dwell in you richly,
Since your whole life is bound up with Christ,

Therefore,
whatever you do in word or deed,
do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Christ is the center.

Everything in your life should revolve around him.
When you speak, it is in his name!
When you act, it is for his glory.
But PLEASE do not get legalistic about this!
This is not done out of guilt,
or out of some sense that YOU can please God in your own efforts!

NO!

You do all things out of gratitude for what Christ has done for you!
Because YOU ARE IN CHRIST
Because You Have Died with HIM,
and been raised to the right hand of the Father in HIM,
therefore all your life is to be centered in him.

So,

because this is who you are in Christ,
take off your dirty clothes,
take off your filthy, sinful rags,
and put on Christ.

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