Colossians 3:1–5

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

> *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

Colossians and Ephesians — Jordan and Canaan

The relationship between Colossians and Ephesians is best grasped through the type of Israel's history. Colossians answers to the crossing of the Jordan and the first camp in the land at Gilgal — the place of circumcision, where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. Chapter 3 is Gilgal work: *mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.* Ephesians answers to the land of inheritance itself — the Christian already seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6), and fighting in the land against spiritual enemies with the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6). The moral order is Colossians before Ephesians. Israel's defeat at Ai came precisely because they had not returned to Gilgal after the victory at Jericho. The principle of returning to Gilgal — keeping the flesh in the place of death — must precede and accompany all spiritual conflict in the heavenly places.

In Colossians we are told to seek the things which are above, looking upward from our position here. In Ephesians we are already there and are not told to seek

them — we are seated there and are called to walk and to stand. There is a contrast too between the armour of Ephesians 6 and the mortifying of Colossians 3. The armour is about what comes from outside attempting to get in. The mortifying is about what is inside attempting to get out. The internal enemy is the more serious. And nothing in putting off these things of Colossians 3 would interfere with wearing the armour of Ephesians 6.

Since Ye Are Risen with Christ — Seek Things Above

The opening word if is not conditional. It carries the force of since — since you are, as a Christian, risen with Christ, therefore seek the things which are above. The ground is not in doubt; the exhortation flows from the ground. Darby reads: *set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.* This does not allow the compromise of saying, well, I am occupied with earthly things all week but my heart is not in them. The mind itself is to be set on heavenly things — not reluctantly dragged there, but set there, fixed there, occupied there.

Where Christ sitteth — this phrase carries the weight of Hebrews 10:12: *this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down in perpetuity at the right hand of God.* He sat down because the work was done. The sitting speaks of the perfection of the finished work. There is nothing more to be done for the putting away of sin. It is upon that perfect and completed work that the Christian's eye is to rest and affections are to be drawn. No earthly thing is perfect. This one thing is perfect. And that perfection is the magnet that is meant to draw the soul away from everything that is below.

Your Life Is Hid with Christ in God

Verse 3 gives the ground: *ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* The natural life that the Christian had before conversion defined his horizon as the world. That life has been cut off — it is dead — and a new life has been

given, hidden with Christ in God. This new life is not identified with natural human existence; it is eternal life — and eternal life is more than eternal existence. The lost who spend eternity in hell have eternal existence but not eternal life. Eternal life is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). It is the life that flows from that knowledge, and it is this life that the Christian has hidden with Christ in God.

Verse 4 adds the prospect: *when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.* The armies that follow Him out of heaven on white horses in Revelation 19 are the display of this. He is to be admired in all them that believe — not merely admired by them, but admired in them. Every saved sinner who appears with Him out of heaven is a testimony to who He is and what He has done. Both the hope of appearing with Him and the present hiding of life in Him are calculated to draw the soul away from earthly things and set its affections firmly above. Titus 2:12-13 connects the same two things: denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and looking for the blessed hope.

Mortify Therefore — A Settled, Past, Continuing Act

The therefore of verse 5 ties what follows directly to everything above. Because of the resurrection life, because of the hidden life with Christ, because of the appearing — therefore put to death your members on the earth. The aorist tense in which mortify stands is important: it means to be in the present condition of one who has in the past done this as a completed act. Have it done with — have it settled, finished, not picked up again. Not to go through the putting to death every morning anew; but to be in the present condition of one who once for all settled it. Galatians 5:24 expresses the same: *they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.* That is the condition of all who belong to Him.

The five things listed — fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness — are not a random sample of sins. They are things that grab the soul and hold it. All of them have to do with misdirected desire — with the soul being held captive by things below. The last, covetousness, is unbridled desire, which is idolatry. Idolatry is whatever comes between the soul and Christ, whatever holds the soul's full desire. And by naming covetousness at the close, the list becomes a summary of everything: any unbridled desire for what is earthly is idolatry, because it places an earthly object in the place that belongs to Christ alone.

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