

Prayer

Save us, O Lord, from being consumed by our own concerns and interests.
Direct our hearts towards a genuine concern for those who need our love;
Show us how we may best offer help, care, fellowship and friendship;
Inspire us so that we may be enthused by the work of Your Church in the world;
Lift us out of selfishness, so that we might find fulfilment in You.
Thank You, Lord God: AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Hope

Pray about the coming of Christ in glory, and the hope of God's just judgement on all people and all things. Pray that this message of love and justice will inspire people to faith.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for leaders preparing for the G20 summit in London*
- *Give thanks for wherever evil is defeated*
- *Pray for those who do not know how to face life*

Meditation

Jesus, You call me ever onwards; You are my Saviour!

If I must change, may I remain strong in faith:

If I have sinned, may I repent and confess all:

If I need to put things right, may I do so with wisdom:

If I must speak, may I be a timely prophet:

If I have been silent, may I open up to others:

If I need to give testimony to You, may I do so graciously:

If I must listen, may I be attentive to all You say:

If I have been deaf, break the hardness of my heart:

If I need to wait on You, may I be patient and trusting:

If I must challenge, may I preach Your Word alone:

If I have to be courageous, may I show true humility:

If I need to stand firm, may I remain confident in You:

Jesus, You call me ever onwards, You have saved me!

Bible Study - Colossians 3:1-11

¹ *If you have then been raised with Christ, strive for higher things, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² *Think about higher things, not on earthly things,* ³ *for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* ⁴ *When Christ appears (who is your life), then you will also appear with Him in glory.*

⁵ *So put to death the parts of you that are earthly: sexual immorality, impurity, passions, evil desires and covetousness (which is idolatry).* ⁶ *Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient.* ⁷ *Once, you*

*used to walk in these ways, when you were living that life;*⁸ *but now you must get rid of all these things, wrath, anger, wickedness, slander and obscene language from your mouth.*⁹ *Do not lie to one another, since you have removed your old self with its behaviour,*¹⁰ *and replaced it with the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Maker;*¹¹ *in this there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all in all!*

Review

This passage begins with a description of the moral and ethical standards of Christian life, which takes up the rest of chapter 3 of Paul's letter to the Colossians. Clearly, Paul was concerned about the heresies which were threatening the Colossian church (2:16-23), and his advice about how to live the Christian life is something of a reaction to these incorrect religious theories (see yesterday's study). It is not surprising therefore that at the beginning of this part of his letter, Paul focussed on the idea of a Christian taking part in the life of the risen Christ (3:1-4). He then went on to describe behaviour incompatible with the life of Christ (3:5-10) before turning to examples of godly morality (3:12f.). This form of teaching is typical of Paul's letters, for whatever letter we read, his moral teaching is exclusively based on Christ. Paul taught that those who are saved by the grace of God are changed by their salvation; their lives are uniquely identified with Christ (3:3), and will be so until the end of time (3:4).

A morality that can be lived! One of the first things Paul said to the Colossians in his moral teaching was this; 'strive for higher things' (3:1). On the surface, this appears to suggest that people can obtain high standards of morality through the personal effort of 'striving'. Without Christ, of course, striving is an effort that is focussed on personal attainment and knowledge, and this was typical of the many heresies that Paul sought to expose and dismiss from the Christian church. However, striving for the higher things of Christ is focussed not on 'self', but on God Himself and Christ. In Him we are liberated, because our salvation does not depend upon any special knowledge, or personal attainment or ability. Those who live 'in Christ' have the power of God available to them so that they can strive for higher things in His strength. They can begin to live a moral life by getting rid of evil because Christ is victorious over evil, for example, not because they are. They are able to put all wickedness and evil 'to death' (3:5), to 'get rid' of it (3:8) and have it 'thrown away' (3:9), because Christ replaces all these things in the believer. Using the language of removing dirty clothes and replacing them with clean (3:10), Paul reminded his readers that their behaviour and morality was something that was 'being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Maker' (3:10); a renewal that unifies all who follow Christ.

The putting off of evil Of course, if we are to take on Christ and strive for higher things, then what is earthly and evil must be set aside, and this is the gist of Paul's list in verses 5 to 9. We tend to look over such lists of wrongdoing and evil in Paul's letters, but they are significant. We should at least notice that in almost every letter of Paul's, his advice about Christian living includes a similar list of things that should be rejected. They cannot be simply omitted by default; they should be known, understood and dismissed from the individual and the church. For example, in Paul's letter to the Galatians, in which Paul berated those who sought to draw Christians back into Judaism, he included this evil amongst others that should be avoided (Gal 5:16-21) before writing the famous list of the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5:23f.).

Good teaching! What is significant about our passage is that Paul took the teaching of the heretics he opposed and proceeded to turn it against them. They had taught about finding the 'higher secrets' of the principalities and powers of the universe, but Paul capped

this by declaring that all 'higher things' were freely available in Christ! (3:1-4) They had taught that to be morally good, you had to live according to strict moral standards and deny bodily pleasures; but Paul declared the way of liberation, saying that in Christ, you can 'put off' all sin and evil as easily as tacking off your clothes! (3:9-11).

This has always been a good method of arguing, particularly in matters of faith, for if our God is greater than any other religion, then anything they claim, if it is good in any way, can at least be found in Christ. However, in Christ, this goodness is exceeded, for the God who made all things is always greater than our imagination, which is where all other religions come from! Today's passage focuses on the importance of being 'in Christ' (3:1-4) and the moral consequences of getting rid of what is evil in our lives by the power of God, and in tomorrow's passage, Paul goes on to speak of the positive moral consequences of being 'in Christ'.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. When Scripture says 'you have died, and your life is hid with Christ', what comes in to your mind? Share your thoughts with your group.
2. Is it possible to be focussed on Christ all the time? What comes in the way of this?
3. Which of the evils mentioned in our passage are the most difficult to deal with because they are prevalent within the church, and why?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This text is challenging. I find it difficult to write about this scripture because in its light, most of us stand condemned because of our failure in some way to put aside what is wrong and evil, and live according to the truths we profess. On the other hand, the glory of the truth of our salvation is hardly better expressed than in phrases such as we find here; our life is 'hid with Christ' (3:3), for example. The key, of course, is to be conscious of what we are doing and what we believe. More than half the battle is won if we know to what we aspire, and have professed complete faith in Christ, even if we find that living is difficult and we do not know how to deal with certain difficult issues.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Read carefully the lists of evil and wrong-doing in verses 5 and 8. Are you aware that any of these either have afflicted you in the past, or still afflict you today? Read over the first part of the text (3:1-4) several times and consider how you either have dealt with them, or can deal with any of them.*
- *Pray for all who struggle with issues in their lives that they cannot seem to shift or deal with before God. Pray for the Lord's blessing on all who help and counsel people in such need.*

Final Prayer

Let me hear Your voice, faithful God and Lord of all. Speak to me so that I may know Your will, whether it be hard or easy, comforting or challenging, exciting or mundane; and let me value each and every word, which are the instructions You give for the life of Your servant. Thank You Lord God; AMEN