

(Rocky – Lesson 8 Handout – 11/10/2024) **A HEAVENLY MINDSET**
(Colossians 3:1-11)

OUR OPENING SCRIPTURE:

*Brethren, join together in following my example, and pay attention to those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk – of whom I often told you ... and now tell you even weeping – **that they are enemies of the cross of Christ**, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.*

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we wait eagerly for a Savior, **the Lord Jesus Christ**, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power He has to put all things in subjection to Himself – *Philippians 3:17-21.**

EXEGESIS: Our passage today is COLOSSIANS 3:1-11 ... This passage can be divided easily into two sections: VERSES 1-4 and VERSES 5-11. This is made obvious by the dual-use of the CONJUNCTION ‘THEREFORE’ (in verses 1 and 5) – (As you know) ‘THEREFORE’ is a term that introduces a conclusion.

So let’s begin by reading the first section of our passage – **[READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-4]** –

TWO PARALLEL COMMANDS CONSTITUTE THE HEART OF THIS PARAGRAPH:

- (1) Set your hearts on things above (vs. 1), and ...
- (2) Set your minds on things above (vs. 2).

(Remember, in the New Testament, the heart is not the seat of feelings and emotions; it is the seat of thinking ... So ‘setting your heart’ and ‘setting your mind’ on things above essentially is the same command.)

PAUL expressed himself in this way to make it clear we are to seek heavenly things with our whole being.

Now it is important to note that PAUL grounds these commands – *and they are commands, not suggestions* – in two things we have studied in some detail already ... The commands are grounded in *the believer’s identification* with CHRIST in HIS DEATH (vs. 3) and in HIS RESURRECTION (vs. 1).

PAUL concludes with an expression of confidence that this identification will extend to CHRIST’S SECOND ADVENT, *the time when He is revealed to the world¹* ... and believers will appear with Him in GLORY (vs. 4; see also Revelation 19:11-13, 15-16).

I have titled our lesson: ‘A HEAVENLY MINDSET’ because ... *this seems to be the overall theme of the passage* ... but if we were to summarize VERSES 1-4 and then VERSES 5-11 ... We might think of the first of these two sections as presenting *A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WE NOW LIVE and THE PREVIOUS LIFE WE LIVED AS UNBELIEVERS* ... A LIFE PAUL refers to in *Ephesians 4:22* ... as ‘THE OLD SELF’ (by which he means ‘your former manner of life’).

The second section will focus on THE MORTIFICATION OF THIS OLD SELF – which involves *(first) a change in our thinking*, followed by *a change in our lifestyles*.

PAUL wrote COLOSSIANS to encourage THE CHURCH by presenting JESUS CHRIST as THE FOCAL POINT OF HISTORY and as SOVEREIGN OVER ALL CREATION.

¹ *This is a reference to the 2nd Advent, not the Rapture. At the Rapture, Christ is not revealed to the world; His revelation occurs when He comes and stands on the Mount of Olives and Israel acknowledges Him as the Messiah. Believers, who already have been raptured prior to the Tribulation, and therefore prior to the 2nd Advent, will accompany Christ when He comes to establish the Davidic Kingdom, a time we refer to as ‘the Millennium.’*

In COLOSSIANS 2:9 he asserted THE COMPLETE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST by saying: “*For in Him all the fullness of DEITY dwells in BODILY FORM.*” This means JESUS CHRIST possesses EVERY DIVINE ATTRIBUTE; it is a declaration that JESUS CHRIST is EQUAL IN EVERY WAY with THE FATHER and THE HOLY SPIRIT. HE IS THE SON, THE 2ND PERSON OF THE TRINITY, INCARNATE.

Then in COLOSSIANS 2:10, PAUL sets forth a second conclusion ... *viz., that believers are ‘COMPLETE IN HIM’* because HE IS ‘THE HEAD OVER ALL PRINCIPALITY AND POWER’ (KJV). ‘PRINCIPALITY AND POWER’ is a reference to SPIRITUAL BEINGS (ref. Colossians 1:16). In His role as CREATOR of all things ... *visible and invisible* ... CHRIST has *de facto* rule and authority over all Creation.

He has been given this AUTHORITY by GOD THE FATHER – And *since* we are IN CHRIST, *i.e., we are positioned in Him through our identification with His death and resurrection, WE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM* – not of our own doing, but by having been adopted into the family of God IN CHRIST.

Perhaps we are not aware – *at least not sufficiently* – that already we have been made complete IN CHRIST. The verb translated ‘*have been made complete*’ might better be rendered, ‘*are made complete.*’ The word is πληρώω (pronounced ‘plerōō’) and it is written in the PERFECT TENSE. This means there is an acknowledgement that something took place in the past, but in this case, the emphasis is on ‘*a state of being in the present.*’ Put simply: the false teachers in COLOSSAE were teaching ‘SANCTIFICATION BY WORKS.’ PAUL’S counter to this heresy is to tell THE COLOSSIANS ‘*they already have been made COMPLETE because they are ‘POSITIONALLY IN CHRIST’ and therefore they lack nothing.*’

When we consider THE WORD OF GOD – THE SCRIPTURES – It is important to recognize that both THE OLD TESTAMENT and THE NEW TESTAMENT present THE LORD JESUS CHRIST as THE HEAD OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

IN THIS CLASS WE HAVE REFERRED TO HIM AS OUR FEDERAL HEAD.

- ADAM was OUR FEDERAL HEAD IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN when he failed to obey God regarding THE ONE COMMANDMENT God set before him, resulting in the imputation of the guilt of ADAM’S TRANSGRESSION to the entire human race, *and* ...
- JESUS is OUR FEDERAL HEAD IN THE ATONEMENT by which THE ELECT are called to faith efficaciously by THE HOLY SPIRIT when the gospel is presented and God opens the hearts of His people to believe His Word.

This is true both in THE OLD TESTAMENT and in THE NEW TESTAMENT.

In THE OLD TESTAMENT, particularly in THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS, the atoning work of CHRIST ON THE CROSS was *foreshadowed* by the offering of THE WHOLE BURNT OFFERING. A BELIEVING JEW would bring a sacrifice from the flock or the herd ... *a male animal without flaw* ... to represent him in a ritual that foreshadowed THE FUTURE SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST. The animal was brought to the door of the Tabernacle ... *and in later years, to the Temple* ... where it was examined by a priest to insure its acceptability. The sacrificial animal had to be without flaw because it *foreshadowed* THE LORD JESUS CHRIST who is without sin. Upon the approval of the priest, the worshiper would place his hand on the head of the sacrificial animal *in a symbolic gesture that represented the transfer of the worshiper’s sin to the animal that then was killed* – for we know from THE GARDEN OF EDEN forward, ‘THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH.’

The symbolism of the identification of the Jewish worshiper with the sacrificial animal illustrated in graphic form what took place at CALVARY, when *the sins of the world were imputed*

to JESUS CHRIST, who died on the Cross as our substitute, just as the sacrificial animal died as the symbolic substitute for the Jewish worshiper.

Though the symbolism is clear, the difference is stark ... for the animal was but *a placeholder* and *a didactic illustration* of a final, perfect sacrifice that would take place when *the Son of God was crucified once-and-for-all for the sins of all who believe in Him* ... both from among the Jews and from among the pagan Gentiles.

Recently we spent four-weeks studying THREE BIBLICAL IMPUTATIONS ... and here in THIS OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICE we see those lessons played out in graphic detail: *The sins of the individual are identified with (i.e., IMPUTED TO) the unblemished animal, and the unblemished innocence of the animal – REPRESENTING JESUS CHRIST IN HIS ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUSNESS – is transferred (IMPUTED) to the worshiper.* The sins of the individual are identified with (i.e., IMPUTED TO) the unblemished animal, and the unblemished innocence of the animal – REPRESENTING JESUS CHRIST IN HIS ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUSNESS – is transferred (IMPUTED) to the worshiper. This is what is known as ‘*a representative transaction.*’ The animal stood in the place of (i.e., it represented) the person – the individual worshiper.

Now let’s turn to the second section of our passage, beginning with VERSE 5, where we encounter the second occurrence of the conjunction, ‘*THEREFORE*’ – [READ COLOSSIANS 3:5-11] –

PAUL begins this second section with a conclusion drawn from the previous verses: ‘*In light of our unique position in Christ, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.*’

If there is one thing that is clear in all of PAUL’S writings, it is that there is a distinct difference in how we should live as CHRISTIANS, *vis-à-vis* how we lived as unbelievers. Consider what PAUL wrote in Romans Chapter 8: “*We are not under obligation to live according to the FLESH – for if you are living according to the FLESH, you must DIE; but if (you are living) according to the SPIRIT you are putting to death the deeds of the body*” – Romans 8:12-13.

THE FLESH² is a metaphor for that part of us that is not yet redeemed, *viz., our bodies*. It is the seat of the OLD SIN NATURE that remains in us even after we have been saved. And it is the source of sinful desires and we will not be rid of it until we die or until we are changed when JESUS comes for His Church at the Rapture.

THE NASB translates verse 5 ‘*CONSIDER YOUR EARTHLY BODY AS DEAD TO SIN,*’ but THE NIV reads: ‘*PUT IT TO DEATH,*’ and this is closer to the Greek text. The verb *νεκρώω* (*pronounced nekroō*) – means ‘to put to death ... to kill’ and it is an IMPERATIVE, indicating we are to exert a conscious effort not to let sin have dominion over us. PAUL can demand this type of obedience because ‘*WE ARE A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST*’ and ‘*OUR LIVES ARE HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD.*’

² See Romans 6:5-7, 12-14; 7:4-12.

Keep in mind, whereas THE JEWS had THE OLD TESTAMENT and a pretty clear understanding of what God expected of them morally – *especially after THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY*³ – THE COLOSSIANS did not.

THE GENTILES IN COLOSSAE had very different backgrounds. Unlike THE JEWS, THESE GENTILES were pagans ... They were involved in all sorts of immoral acts and attitudes ... so with them, PAUL faced a different challenge. *The world from which THE COLOSSIANS were saved was one of stark immorality*, and PAUL had to teach them what was and was not acceptable in light of their new-found faith.

PAUL points out that the renewal brought about by our individual identity with CHRIST does more than CREATE A NEW PERSON; it CREATES A NEW HUMANITY.

P.T. O'BRIAN⁴ writes regarding a similar verse in EPHESIANS CHAPTER 4: "*Renewal refers not simply to an individual change of character but also to a corporate recreation of humanity in the creator's image.*"

In support of this are eight designations that describe this new corporate humanity that results from 'putting on the new self.' *And six-of-the-eight are presented as contrasting pairs: GREEK and JEWS, CIRCUMCISED and UNCIRCUMCISED, SLAVE and FREEMAN*⁵ – then we have a more difficult to understand pairing: *BARBARIAN and SCYTHIAN*⁶.

The point of the verse is this: PAUL is arguing that 'all who belong to CHRIST make up 'A NEW SEGMENT OF HUMANITY,' yet within this 'NEW HUMANITY,' worldly distinctions still exist – and while rendered 'less-important,' cultural differences are not obliterated.'

This establishes an obligation for us as THE CHURCH not to discriminate against believers, who may be culturally different from the majority, but the same spiritually IN CHRIST.

It is not just the old life and its sinful habits that have been done away with by the new creation, the barriers that once divided us and made us 'a divided people' are no longer in play. In CHRIST there is no spiritual distinction between JEW and GENTILE, between SLAVES and FREEMEN, or even between THE CIVILIZED and THE UNCIVILIZED SCYTHIANS.

The things the world used to separate us: RACE, LANGUAGE, CULTURE, and even PREVIOUS RELIGIOUS OR NON-RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEWS — no longer are a basis for discrimination and separation.

THE JEWS formerly looked down on THE PAGAN GENTILES as an unclean people. This was the problem in GALATIA when THE JUDIAZERS came to town and PETER, who had been eating with

³ *The Jews understood their disobedience of the Mosaic Law was the reason their nation was destroyed, and it was the reason they were deported to Babylon. Idolatry and involvement with the Canaanite fertility cults was a big problem before the Babylonian captivity. It was far less of a problem after the Jews returned to Canaan. As a reactionary response to the idolatry that led to captivity, Israel substituted one failed worldview for another worldview that was equally wrong ... a worldview that ultimately would lead to the destruction of their nation and dispersion among the Gentile nations of the world. Israel replaced idolatry with legalism. The salvation by works heresy we see in the New Testament increased during the Intertestamental Period – Instead of engaging in the cultic fertility worship of the Canaanites, the Jews fell headlong into legalism ... This was a reactionary swing of the pendulum away from idolatry but into legalism.*

⁴ O'Brian, P.T., *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, Pg. 191.

⁵ *Three of these pairs (Gentile and Jew; circumcised and uncircumcised, & slave and freeman: see Romans 1:15; 2:9, 10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 6:8) are commonplace in Paul's writings.*

⁶ *This duality, Barbarian and Scythian, is unusual because nowhere does Paul (or any other writer I can find), use Barbarian and Scythian as opposites. Scythians lived north of the Black Sea and were considered 'the height of the unrefined peoples of the world.' Perhaps we should think of Scythians as 'the Barbarians of the Barbarians.'*

GENTILES, suddenly '*changed tables*' and began eating exclusively with JEWS so as not to be criticized by men who still held to the cultural superiority of the JEWS⁷.

Now THE GREEKS were not innocent either. They looked down on THE JWS as culturally inferior because they did not speak GREEK. Anyone who did not speak GREEK was considered to be A BARBARIAN – or God forbid, A SCYTHIAN.

But THE GOSPEL breaks down these barriers and brings us into a unique unity in THE CHURCH. This is what THE CHURCH is – it is '*A NEW HUMANITY.*' THE GOSPEL does what human institutions never can do.

I want you to think about something. Isn't this what THE UNITED NATIONS claims to be doing – bringing diverse cultures together? How is that working out for the human race? Not very well would be my assessment.

SATAN IS THE GREAT COUNTERFEITER. He consistently tries to emulate what God is doing — *minus God*. And during that time of THE GREAT TRIBULATION, about which JESUS said, "*If those days were not shortened, there would be no human race left on the earth*" (MATTHEW 24:22) – SATAN will for a brief time SET HIS COUNTERFEIT MESSIAH ... THE ANTICHRIST ... over the human race in a failed attempt to unify the world under the control of a single Old Sin Nature — *and he will fail*. He will fail to do what God is doing through the GOSPEL.

Now am I claiming THE CHURCH has fulfilled her duty to live as if all human barriers have disappeared? *Absolutely not!* Not one church member or church leader is without an Old Sin Nature – and this has led to egregious abuses. But what PAUL is telling us is we need to strive to live in unity, focused on THE CHURCH as THE BODY IN CHRIST, and we must refute the sin of discrimination.

And though PETER did not act as he should toward THE GENTILE CHRISTIANS when THE JUDAIZERS came to town, PETER accepted the criticism of PAUL regarding the matter and he repented.

TEMPORAL SANCTIFICATION IS A PROCESS. As we come to understand '*who we are IN CHRIST,*' we can begin *unraveling* the things that characterized us in our old life and *replacing* them with attitudes and actions that reflect the new nature we have as CHRISTIANS.

JESUS CHRIST is coming back to this earth to set up the Kingdom that was promised to DAVID – He will sit on DAVID'S THRONE IN JERUSALEM and HE WILL RULE AS KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

PHILIPPIANS tells us, when this happens, "*every knee will bow and every tongue will confess JESUS to be LORD to THE GLORY of GOD THE FATHER*" (Philippians 2:10-11).

This is our HOPE and this is where our spiritual mind's eyes should be focused – not on the material things of the world, but on Him.

⁷ See Galatians 2:11-13.