

Colossians 3

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 15 June 2009 00:00

Christian lives are Christo-centric, not ego-centric. It means everything revolves around the Son of God, and not us. (Not that we see much evidence in the lives of Christians today). Because everything is Christo-centric, it has a remarkable bonus – that even if we sin, in Christ we are ‘perfect’!

Rather than moan about our sins and our lack of faith, we should, therefore, turn back to Christ and let *His* purity and holiness protect us. Then, we will indeed sin on times, but we can immediately repent and get back on track with Christ. Yes, we must continually strive to be perfect and holy, but when we fail (which we must) we need not fall apart and enter depression. This is because Christ never changes and is always perfect. It is *His* perfection the Father sees when He looks upon us. If He looked upon us apart from His Son, we would immediately be condemned.

What I am talking about is very simple. The complexity is in those who have not yet got it in their minds and hearts! If you are a Christian, do not struggle to get yourself right with God by all kinds of works – God does it all. Repent and carry on! So many Christians enter into a twilight world of regret and failure; so many become depressed and forlorn. But why? Christ has saved us! Everything has been done already. All we need to do is walk the path of righteousness, and, when we stray, to repent and get back on the path.

Verses 1 - 4

1.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2.

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3.

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

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4.

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Paul tells the Colossians that if they are Believers ('risen with Christ') then they will automatically want what is holy, true and divine ("seek those things which are above"). This can be added to the demand by Christ: 'if you love me, do what I say'. He could make that demand because He is God the Son. Any person who does not match his or her claim to salvation with actual activity that proves it, must be held suspect.

Even at times when secrecy is required, a Christian person should be able to tell if his companion is a Christian or not, because he will prove it by his thoughts, words and actions. All will aspire to heaven. Without this activity, no man should expect other Christians to accept his claim to salvation. It is, then, nonsense, and a ploy to divert attention, when a man claims to be Christian and then says that his faith is only between 'him and God'. If his faith is not obviously heavenward, he is lying, or he is deluded. Also, such a claim is usually a cover for sin.

On this earth there should be no difference between a claim to faith and outward actions. Everything should marry together: doctrine, statements, lifestyle... all point towards Christ and the desire to live an holy life. This is because, for a Christian, Christ IS his life.

Verse 2 repeats the demand. Our affection – everything about us – should want divine things. We should want to satisfy God, not ourselves. The earth will burn to a crisp whilst heaven remains, so why desire after what is soon to die? As Paul says, the genuine Christian is already dead (to the world) and his spirit is bound within Christ, in God.

When Christ returns on that final day, we will appear with Him in the skies. If alive at that time, we will arise in a transformed body. If dead, we will be given a brand new body and will also arise, brand new. So, do not cling to what is earthly; when Christ comes, all old things will disappear.

Verses 5 - 8

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1.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

2.

For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

3.

In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

4.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

We are to “mortify therefore (our) members”. This is an interesting statement. It means to put to death, or to deprive ourselves of, what belongs to ‘the harlot’s body’. Examples are given by Paul... there are of course, many other sins that we can do, which show the love of our ‘old man’ for spiritual whoredom!

The list begins with fornication, from which we get our word for ‘pornography’. It has two meanings: one is illicit sexual intercourse; the other is idolatry. The first covers all manner of sexual activity, whether with same-sex, other sex, incest, divorced people, animals, and so on. Adultery is a sub-kind, too. The only legitimate sexual contact is between husband and wife. There are no others. Sadly, many Christian youngsters now adopt the way of the world and ‘sleep together’, or even live together. They therefore stand stained before Almighty God.

Idolatry is more than just worshipping a statue in a temple. It includes worship of, or adherence to, any false religion... Romanism, charismaticism, Mormon, and so on. Christians come dangerously close to this when affiliating with those who do the same, because by their association they condone what their friends do.

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Uncleanness comes next. This can mean physical impurity, but in this case Paul refers to a mind that embraces what is sinful: immorality, impurity of motives, and luxurious living given over to hedonism, which is lust.

Next comes 'inordinate affection', from which we get the word 'pathetic'. In this text it means depraved passions. This can be for anything or anyone. The problem is not just with the passion, but with the fact that such a passion affects our whole mind and heart. If we look at young people today, who hunger for 'nights out', we find their dances are immoral, drink or drugs are usually involved, violence, plus illicit sex and accompanying disease. And youngsters who indulge in these activities have their minds filled with what is immoral and impure.

When a youngster leaves home at night to enter clubs and comes home late, do not imagine it is just about repetitive music... it is a lifestyle that ruins the mind and heart, making it immune to sense and reason. Even if the youngster does not indulge in these excesses personally, he or she will have such evils imprinted on their minds. This influence is virtually guaranteed and it is destroying generations of people. Indeed, the Greek meaning includes the idea of a mental and emotional affliction.

And what of "evil concupiscence"? Concupiscence is epithymia – the craving for what is forbidden, another form of sinful lust. It is 'evil', kakos: not as it should be, a wrong way of thinking, pernicious, destructive. God tells us what is wrong and to be avoided. When we go after it, we ruin our lives and oppose God. This can happen in a lesser way, such as when Christians refuse to alter their sinful ways, though rebuked or admonished. It shows they prefer their sinfulness to God's purity. Of course, it would be double-minded to rebuke another if we are ourselves guilty of the same things.

Covetousness is also mentioned, because Paul says it is 'idolatry'. Basically, it is greed (for anything). It is to have, and to want more. The object in life is then to continually spend time in getting extra. This can apply not just to money, but to anything that is our inward desire. It is what we spend our efforts on; it is what takes up our time; it is what we desire to do with our waking hours. It comes higher than love of God, love of family and even self-respect.

Many families are ruined by this one-sided love of one member for whatever is his or her desire. This is idolatry because it places one's own desires above that of God. There is no respect

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shown for God, and balance is lost in everyday life, as one person aims for his or her own desires, regardless of the wishes or feelings of others.

Paul warns the Colossians that people who do these things (“children of disobedience”), incur the wrath of God. Strictly speaking, this term – ‘children of disobedience’ – applies to all men, whether saved or not. However, in this text, Paul is comparing, saying that we were once like that, but our salvation has given us a new direction. We should no longer be drawn towards these things. It does not refer to occasional sin and waywardness, for we all can stray. It means a continuous, stubborn refusal to do what is godly. Those who continue in their sins will know the wrath of God in their lives. Even Christians can fall into this way of evil.

The Colossians once lived in all these sinful ways. Their city was idolatrous and hedonistic and the atmosphere around them was filled with godlessness; they had to be careful to walk uprightly. Paul adds other things to avoid:

Anger. This refers to a personality trait, when anger is the response to everything and loss of temper is usual. It shows that the person’s mind is agitated, usually by guilt. Wrath can be experienced separately, though it can also be the result of always being angry. It is an anger that explodes suddenly and then subsides, often in an act of passion. Paul is saying that we must balance our minds so that holiness rules and not passions.

Malice can also be linked to an inward anger. Malice is ill-will towards others, and it is malignant. It leads a person into trouble, when even law-breaking is considered, including physical assault on people, animals or things. We see this all around us today.

Blasphemy is another sin to avoid. In this text it has one of two meanings, and both apply. The first is the wickedness spoken against God and His name. The second is slander: the desire to ruin a man’s good name without good reason. Sadly, too many are willing to enter into this state of mind, Christian against Christian.

It has been said that it is ‘blasphemous’ to speak against certain movements (such as charismaticism) and those within it. This is erroneous, for one cannot blaspheme what is itself blasphemous! There is a time to speak out against blasphemous people and movements, or we stand condemned ourselves.

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Paul now mentions “filthy communication”. This is foul speech; obscene words and ideas; gutter language. We cannot deny that this is all around us also, a sign of our depraved times. We hear this language in public, on buses, in the streets and supermarkets, on TV and radio. It is heard routinely in work places and places of leisure, and no-one seems shocked by it. It is a sure sign that the worst of evils is common to the people. The existence of the language as part of everyday life is proof that wickedness is ruling the nation. Lewdness is also included, degrading society.

I have never been one to use slang as everyday speech. I tend to use ‘proper English’ as a rule. This is because the slide to the gutter begins with changes in word usage. I shudder when I hear Christians say “Oh God” as an exclamation! I have even heard bad language. Such epithets are not part of God’s will. Be careful what you say.

Verses 9 - 11

1.

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

2.

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

3.

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

Paul says that because we are saved and have, by definition, shunned the ‘old man’ within, we must “lie not one to another”. This means what it says: not to use falsehoods in order to deceive a fellow Christian. There is no need to be surprised by that, because it happens regularly in our churches.

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Many Christians spend much time covering their tracks, or making sure no-one knows what they are truly up to. I often refer to the 'evangelical smile' that is routinely shown every Sunday, or whenever one Christian meets another. How often is it genuine? Rarely. This is because few Christians know what it is to speak frankly and yet lovingly. They think 'love' means to pretend everything is fine!

We are renewed! Our newness means that we mirror the image of the One Who saved us. He is transparent, and so should we be clear in motive and speech!

A Christian is simply a Christian. His origin makes no difference. Jewish or foreign, circumcised or not, untaught (Barbarian) or Scythian (refers to people of Russia at the time, who were considered the wildest of barbarians), freemen or slaves... they are all equal when saved. Christ is the same Head of them all, and His will should be paramount in all.

How many cliques are in your church? They should not be there! Do you think you are better than that failing Christian down the road? Forget it – we are all the same. We all need Christ to be saved and all need Him to live. We all make mistakes, and we all sin deliberately! None is greater and none are less. Without Christ we are equally miserable creatures.

Verses 12 - 15

1.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

2.

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

3.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

4.

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And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

Paul then brings together the various strands of his argument: "Put on therefore". 'Because of this', he is saying, 'you must do the following'. We must do it because we are the "elect of God, holy and beloved". Make no mistake, and never give in to the strident voices of Arminianism! We are 'elect', eklektos. This means God has chosen us to be saved. We did not choose Him.

And, because we are saved by the glorious sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are also loved by God and made holy by Him. We do not always live up to that holiness, but that is what our condition really is. This is why we should never wallow in despair or self-punishment when we sin. We are not absolute sinners seeking holiness... we are holy people seeking to repent! We are already holy, but we often need to seek forgiveness for things that taint our holy state.

Because we are already holy and strive to stay that way, we must display "bowels of mercies". That is, our heart must always be ready to show mercy, just as God shows us mercy. It does not mean being emotional, because emotions can mislead us into all kinds of stupidity and wrong actions. It means to show others the same mercy as God shows us. Many may not like the fact, but we are no better than the worst offender. We are all capable of the most vile wickedness. Therefore, let us show a measure of pity when a fellow Christian falls. We cannot condone a sin, but we can certainly understand.

We must also show morality and goodness, kindness towards our fellows. We should have a "humbleness of mind". That is, an humble opinion of one's self, a realization that we are just as sinful as the next person; and show modesty, not vaunting one's self with pride. I know who I am. I know I am a sinner saved by grace and not by anything within me. I know I am no better than my fellows. Do you? Let us all develop true modesty.

Another feature of a Christian is meekness. Unfortunately, this usually translates as a limp handshake and a false weak smile. But, this is not what meekness really is. Yes, it means to be gentle and mild. It is not, however, the full story. The mildness is of disposition; the gentleness is of spirit. We must be, then, of a mild and gentle nature.

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This does not mean we cannot be tough when needs be, or strict as the situation demands... even a warrior can be meek. It certainly does not mean being a 'pushover', or a 'doormat', or someone who caves in at the slightest pressure or threat. Nor does it mean dealing softly with people when softness is not the answer. Jesus was 'meek and mild', and yet His treatment of the Pharisees was blunt, direct and tough.

King David was humble and yet he fought and killed his enemies. Without this directness and toughness no man can stand firm, and no man can *be* a man. Much that passes off as humility and meekness in Christians is falsity, a desire to be *thought* of as meek, when the heart is far from it.

The Christian must also be willing and able to suffer. Many say they are willing to suffer, but when suffering comes they falter or fail. Longsuffering is patience in the face of adversity, an inner promise to endure what may seem unendurable; it is staying steadfast when challenged and to remain true when we are hit time and again by all manner of ills and violence. When this characteristic is genuine, the person will not try to avenge himself on those who persecute him, nor will he hate them.

This does not mean Christians must put up with everything and be punch-bags. If at all possible they should escape such a situation. But, when there is no other way, they must stand firmly and hand their lives over to God. This kind of trait does not refer to minor or infrequent trials, but to continuous suffering and trials... something few western Christians understand or experience.

We must also forebear each other - not much witnessed by us today! It means to hold each other up, to help to maintain a solid base, to help others to endure. This might work within one's own clique or church, but rarely is found outside it. I have been privileged to witness this feature in my own life, in the continuous support given by just a few. These I commend to God for special blessings, as Paul commended those who supported him.

Christians must forgive each other, too. There is widespread misunderstanding about this, for people cannot be forgiven unless they repent and seek it. If one Christian has offended another, and repents, then he must be forgiven. The model is found in the way Christ forgave us and gave us salvation. Being mere men we may fall out with our fellows, but we must try to quickly sort the matter out... the offending one must repent and ask forgiveness, and the offended one

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must accept and forgive.

I have not seen much of this activity in my lifetime, though it is the scriptural requirement. To forgive quickly is to lay aside what ails a group. It recognizes that we can all fail, but that a humble heart will not dwell on an offence against it.

What bonds us in perfection is charity (verse 14). Charity, of course, is love, agapē, that general affection all Christians should have for each other. Again, I rarely see this. Which is probably why there is little Christian togetherness in the churches, and why there is no united front. Every Christian claims it, but few practice it! The evidence is obvious to see. This love for each other is the bond, the syndesmos or ligaments, that bind us all together as one. In reality, many of those ligaments seem intent on injuring the others, making the whole body limp and damaged.

Yet, this bond is supposed to be 'perfection', which means moral, spiritual and intellectual fitness. Christians who reject other Christians, then, are immoral, unspiritual and lack in intellectual attainment. Instead of doing others damage they should be building-up and encouraging, even when those they help seem reluctant or weak. "Oh that other Christians should be more like me!!" Is this not the inward secret desire of our hearts? Be honest! We are all different. Let us get on with unity and not fight, but let that unity be in truth.

It stands to reason that if we had all the above characteristics, we could comply with verse 15: that the peace of God should rule in our hearts. It allows us to be content with our lot, assured in our salvation, and loving in our relationships with fellow believers. It is how things ought to be, because we are all built into the one body (the Church) by Christ. Therefore, we should be thankful, not just for the Head of the Body, but for the Body itself. That is, each individual Christian.

Verses 16 & 17

1.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

2.

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to

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God and the Father by him.

Paul then moves on to talk about things we ought to have as the source of these holy attributes. We should let the word of Christ (scripture) live in us richly, in all wisdom. Not just scantily, but richly. How many Christians read their Bibles fully and constantly? How many look to see what God is telling them from His word? Without it, they cannot possibly have wisdom, the knowledge of God!

We must teach and admonish each other with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; sing with grace in our hearts to God. What does this mean? We are all given measures of information by God, and we are to pass this on to each other. It is not up to one man to give his own version to everyone else, for we are all learning all the time. Therefore, we must teach each other. We must also warn each other, if one goes wrong, or seems to be in sin. We are told to do this with psalms.

This can mean with music, but, in this text, may mean to recite scripture to each other. That is, to instruct, using the Old Testament. Today, we can include the New. We must also use hymns and spiritual songs, hymnos, meaning a song of praise given to God. Thus, it refers mainly to an attitude of heart.

Such songs or poems were used to instruct others in how to praise God. This would appear to be an Hebrew way of instruction, and probably is the forerunner of hymns in churches today. Note that such hymns were usually accompanied, even though some churches today frown upon music. Really, it comes down to individual local church practice. The onus is on teaching through divine words.

The major stipulation is that we all sing with “grace in (our) hearts to the Lord”. This suggests that the real teaching is that we must instruct each other with the love and praise of God within, so that all is done properly and with due respect for each other and God. It is certainly not a recipe to sing repetitive choruses, or hymns we neither remember nor interpret and discern. How many years have we sung hymns and yet not really examined their content or meaning? Hence – do everything in Jesus’ Name, not in our own strength or will, thanking God in Jesus’ Name, too.

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Verses 18 - 25

1.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

2.

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

3.

Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

4.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

5.

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

6.

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

7.

Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

8.

But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

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Paul brings his pastoral note into the home now, as he tells wives to submit to their own husbands. Is the word 'own' significant? Perhaps. Mainly, the idea is that wives must submit to their husbands. It contains the idea of being subordinate; to obey and to be under the husband's control and advice. In reality it means the husband is the head of the household and anything done by the wife is with his acceptance and blessing, this being the order of creation. Obviously, this can only take place in a man-woman marriage, and in no other relationship.

Husbands are not to be ogres and should not lord it over their wives. Rather, they must love them. The love here is based on agape but is slightly different; it is *agapaō*, meaning to be well pleased and contented with one's wife, just as God is content with His children. Thus, the love a husband has for his wife should reflect the love God has for him. It is not our human idea of 'love', which is usually an emotional bond. This kind of 'love' means that we care for the welfare of others, even if we have no particular affiliation to them.

Obviously, when we refer to a wife, there is already an affiliation, so the love ought to be even deeper. And no husband may be bitter towards his wife – angry, indignant, irritated, nasty. There should be no sniping words, angry glances, bitter tones of voice, terms of belittlement, etc. In other words, wives are jewels to be treasured, not objects to be put down, ignored or treated badly.

Children (and we are all children!) must obey everything their parents instruct them in, because this pleases God. It does not matter how old a child is; he must obey his parents. No back-chatting, no anger, no retaliation, no bitter responses, no shouting, slamming doors, stamping of feet, cursing, arguments... just obedience. Do we see this in any family today? Is there fault in the parent?

Possibly, because some parents make their children angry (verse 21). This can be done by neglecting them, not giving love, not being there for them, only criticizing every effort, being hard on them when they stumble and do wrong, and so on. Instead, children must be encouraged to do right. If we do so constantly and lovingly, they will grow into balanced human beings.

Mostly, children get their characteristics from their parents, so if they go wrong, look within. Yes, they may also do wrong because of their own sin. Even then, love them and strive to draw them

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with gentle instruction, even if they reject it. To try is better than to become angry. Even so, if the child is not angered by what parents do, they have the onus to obey. There is a caveat of course: children are not bound to obey if their parents want them to do what is against God or godliness.

Employees must obey their employers, not just working strict hours to get their money, but with honour and with perfection. The job should be done well, not just out of duty, because we do all to the glory of God. Watching the clock or trying to gain from an employer behind his back is not honourable, whether or not we like him.

Indeed, we must do everything as if it was being done for the Lord. What this means is that what we do will be top quality and the very best we can achieve. We will do so because God will see and reward us spiritually. But, if we do what the world does, God will see that, too, and will punish, whether Christian or not.

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