**The Letter to the Colossians**

**The Gospel in Heathen and Multi-Religious Society - #8**

**Faith in Christ Means Action**

**Colossians Chapter 3**

**Colossians 3:1-2 - Being Raised with Christ**

***1*** *If, then, you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.* ***2*** *Have a mind for things above, not for things on earth.*

**We share the life of the risen Lord – How?**

One common mistake is that we think that actions are good works *vis a vis* bad works. This dualistic mind set has to be treated at the root.

1. What do we really love?

2. Love is the dynamic root of all our actions.

3. We don’t need to learn love; we all have a spark of love in us called “self-love.”

4. If we want to rediscover self-love just look at our actions which we make daily. They all come from this hidden self-love.

5. But if we think that Jesus comes to us in the form of “do this and don’t do that” then this is what will happen – we will focus on works.

**Dialogue with Philemon**

**On the Law**

**Philemon:** Life under the Law and in the Law has no room for love. Do you know why?

**George:** Tell me.

**Philemon:** The Law tells you what to do and what you must not do. The Law binds you to yourself, not to God. The Law deals with the self not with God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

**Colossians 3:3-4 – Hidden in Christ**

***3*** *After all, you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* ***4*** *When Christ in your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed in glory with him.*

**Grace is Christ himself**

God’s favor to us is Christ his Son who is the second Person of the Trinity, not an idea. In the words of Paul we just read, there *is no reference to heart or mind in the original language.*  Why do our translations say heart and mind? This is the western reading of Paul. They are trying to clarify. What is the meaning of seeking, that which is above? If there is union with Christ it cannot be in the heart or mind that is a rational understanding or feelings only. It is our entire personal life. How*?*

1. Jesus is our God. We see and touch what he created and what he gave existence and has blessed all for our use.

2. So if we live in a cosmos where our Lord is enthroned as its King from our eyes, to give us freedom, let us be royal:

a. Our words are for truth.

b. Our love masters our life.

We have been crucified, now we are raised with him. Seek what has become our life by our union with Christ in his resurrection. The cross by itself is an act of divine revelation. But the resurrection cannot be separated from the cross:

1.Both are the actions of the One Person.

2.The cross is the victory over death and the resurrection is that victory became eternal.

**What is above?**

Some think it is heaven “above” and in the old cosmology of the Greeks heaven is the sky. In Christianity when we talk about the visible and invisible some of us think that these are two are separated by a distance.  *The distance between you and another person are not a separated by distance for distance is God’s given grace to reveal our uniqueness.*

**Philemon in the Refectory**

Philemon was sitting in the refectory eating. The Abbot was sitting next to him. He said to Philemon, “I really see you.” Philemon said to the Abbot, “You know Father Abbot; if I put my arm around you the distance between you and me could be like the distance between the moon and the earth. The Abbot asked, “Why?”

Philemon responded, “Our differences keep us apart. But if we love each other there is no distance. We could be on the moon or earth but there would be no distance.” (Philemon)

**Seen and Unseen**

How are the visible and the invisible related? Are they related? Have we dropped these out of our Christian teaching?

1. Distinction between creatures is based on the quality of life, gender, size of body. Our perception in the church is still Greek. Our identity is different. We should be known by humility, love, mercy, knowledge etc.

2. We were not told that the self-awareness in us is a gift of being given to us by Christ; that we are members of one body the church. This is the divine foundation of love. I may attribute my abilities to my knowledge, and wisdom, b*ut its origin is God himself*. I exist. I am.

We read this in Chapters 3-4 in *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius (4th Century), “*Because God is the I Am, the human being can say I am. Because he is, I am.*

We live in the veneer, on life’s surface. Underneath that we have the sense of being. Threats cause us to panic because they threaten our veneer. Our true sense of being cannot be destroyed. The visible and invisible are the same! The being of God extends to me to give me my own beginning as his image. In spite of what has been put on us, the false self-being of sin is a bad perception of our own being. God is my ground!

3. What is the difference between this and New Age?

a. It is a gift from God.

b. We have been created not to be a god but an image of God (Gen 1:26). We were created to be humans; the incarnate Son of God is human so I will be human also.

c. This depth of “being” is not something you can advance on your own. It is a gift you have to receive. I have to grow up in its knowledge by love. Guilt has created in us a “false I am,” so deeply rooted in us. *The ability to say I am is at my very root of my being, but it is a gift of God.*

d. If the visible and invisible are not separated by distance, what is the relation between the two? The visible in Greek mind is the material world; the invisible is the spiritual world. But in proper Christian theology both are forms of life. They are given their particular form of existence by the Creator. (Try Paul M. Blowers, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ,* [*St. Maximus the Confessor*](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&text=St.+Maximus+the+Confessor&search-alias=books&field-author=St.+Maximus+the+Confessor&sort=relevancerank)*.)*

**Seen and Unseen: An Example**

The cactus on the table is given its form of existence by God to live and be formed in that way. The life in the cactus is exactly like mine but different. We each have laws of growth and maturity. The Lord who gave the cactus life gave me life. We are separate to be revealed in coexistence. Each of us has the same life, the quality of our lives distinguishes us but we have the same source of life.

“Being” and “the gift of the Spirit” are the same. *If we are related truly to Christ then we have one purpose. The purpose of our existence unites us.* We have destroyed that understanding by taking our identity from what we do, not what we are. This does not demean the work we do. The jobs/work we do are the gifts of God to each person to keep the cosmos going.

The Cosmic order is like:

1. Things are created for us.

2. There are different forms of life according to their place

3. We are created to enjoy our being according to Origen of Alexandria, or to serve God according to Augustine.

Here are the words of the great Origen of Alexandria:

"Some things are made for their sake, others by consequence and for the sake of the former. Made for its own sake is the living being endowed with reason; made for its use are the animals and the plants of the earth" (*Commentary on Plasmas*, PG 11, 340 a-b)

Man was not created for God *to be God* and that is why man has been given love, freedom of choice and the divine image. St Athanasius commented on this in the book, *Against the Heathen*, (Ch. 1-6)

Things that exist function according to their place in the divine revelation. We function in union. *“The kernel of wheat, unless it falls to the earth and dies, will remain alone.”* (John 12:24). If it dies it brings more of itself. It is the journey of life that goes through death. *Christ as the Logos Creator looked at his creation and loved it and said lets make more of it. The crucifixion is the death of the kernel. We are the same as Christ, the new wheat.*

**Our Hidden life (Colossians 3:3)**

*“… your life is hidden with Christ in God…”*

What is the meaning of hidden? How does this resonate with something from the Old Testament? When our Lord ascended (according to Acts 1:9), He became invisible in the “cloud’ known to us as the Cloud of the divine presence or “Shekinah.” He ascended in the cloud (the Shekinah) not an earthly cloud. Jesus is hidden from our eyes and his activity is not under your control. This is the cloud of unknowing, it is obscure, this is the hiddenness of Christ. *We need to enter into the Shekinah, the Holy Spirit, in order to understand Christ.*

**A Letter from Philemon**

Brother George.

Peace and Joy in the Lord,

You have asked me: Why is Christ hidden in the divine presence? and If I am hidden with him in the Holy Spirit, how can I explore this hiddenness of Jesus?

I have asked the Lord himself, the only teacher that I know. He told me that He is hidden in the familiar; that is, in the hungry, the naked, the sick and the prisoner. I have asked him, Why did he say this? He said, every act of love directed to any of these, is directed to him, because He Jesus loves all these people. But Jesus told me that He is also hidden in the depth of the heart waiting for us to call on him. I did ask Jesus why? He said because true love is that love which humans normally seek. If love is forced on them it is no longer love.

“Love one another” is not a commandment. John Chrysostom commented, “You cannot speak of love and commandment in the same breath.”

**Colossians 3:5 - Put to Death the Earthly**

***5*** *So put your limbs to death to the things on earth: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, which is idolatry.*

Our limbs of the body means the ones we use as tools, since it is through them they are put into action.

**Philemon**

“My body never defiled my mind, but it is my mind which defiles my body. When my mind defiles my body, my body is no longer neutral, but it becomes the tool and even the goal of my lust.” (Philemon)

**Colossians 3:6-7 – Wrath and Disobedience**

*“On account of these the wrath of God is coming (upon the children of disobedience.)”*

**Notes on the use of ‘wrath’ in the NT**

### Matthew and Luke

### Wrath was used once in Matthew (3:7), “*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”*

### The wrath to come is that of judgment, since Jesus never spoke of his Good News as the wrath of God nor Jesus ever spoke of the wrath of God. Historically speaking, “*the wrath to come”* was the distruction of the temple and the Fall of Jerusalem. The same words were repeated in Luke 3:7.

### Jesus himself described the fall of Jerusalem in Luke 21:23 as “the wrath”: “*Alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people.”*

### John

### Wrath was used once in John (3:36), *“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.”*

### This is certainly that of the Day of Judgment because the sense here is the refusal or the rejection of the Son and anyone who can turn to Christ will not be judged.

### Romans

### Wrath was used 10 times in Romans

### Rom 1:18 – *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.”*

### This can’t be about the Gospel because:

### a. Jesus is not the revelation of the wrath of God, because Jesus is the revelation of the righteousness of God; salvation and redemption not from the wrath but from death and sin and wrath on the Day of Judgment.

### b. Then whatever the grammatical constriction of this verse, “is revealed” is about the events of the OT that were known to the Jews of Rome and to the Converts who read the OT. Those who argue to the contrary have failed to show us from history where and when this wrath is revealed or will be revealed. If it is a revealed wrath then it has taken place in time and in history. (Rom 8:1ff says) the contrary that now is the time of salvation.

### Rom 2:5 (twice) – is about the day of wrath and that is the Day of Judgment, *“But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”* This is also repeated in Rom 3:8.

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### Rom 3:5 – is part of the dialogue between Paul and the Jewish objections, *“But if our wickedness serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? I speak in a human way.”* Here it is the hypothetical objection which does not stand up to God’s sole sovereign power.

### Rom 4:15 – indeed, the Law brings the wrath of God on those who trespass. But the argument of Paul is clear: if there is no Law there is no transgression, *“For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.”* The Law did not demand the death of the Son of God. It was God’s love that put forward that redemption.

### Rom 5:9 – *“Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”* Strange, that we are saved from the “wrath of God” by the death of his Son. Yet his Son was not saved from that wrath according to the popular teaching of some of our great preachers. Again, the reference is to the Day of Judgment, not the crucifixion.

### Rom 9:22 – is one of the debatable verses in biblical NT studies. It is part of the mystery of Israel and the acceptance of the Gentiles. *“What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction.”* This has to be seen as a continuation of the preceding argument about the Potter and here the allegory does not allow us to blaspheme and think of God as the Creator of humans for destruction. See the handout on (Rom 9)

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### Rom 12:19 – is a warning against avenging, for God is the sole Judge. *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

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### Rom 13:4-5 (twice) – is about the Christian and the Civil authority. “*For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath which means the civil punishment, but also for the sake of conscience.*”

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### Ephesians

### Wrath was used three times in Ephesians.

* 1. Eph 2:3 – We need to read the chapter starting from verse 1 through verse 10,

“*And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins, in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.*

*Verse 3: Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

* + 1. God’s wrath is waiting for that Day of wrath. The evidence is that his wrath did not rest on us and read the words of Paul, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”*
    2. God does not suffer from schizophrenia, having rich mercy and great love and wrath, for acting to bring us from death to life with his Son means that Jesus did not suffer the penalty of death but abolished it according to (Col 2: ) because to be made alive together with Jesus means that Jesus is “Life” who conquered death.
  1. Eph 4:31 – Paul admonishes us against wrath.

3. Eph 5:6 – *“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”*

It will be good to think that this is still about the Day of Judgment

**Colossians**

Wrath is used twice:

1. Col 3:6 – *“On account of these the wrath of God is coming.”*

On the Day of Judgment

1. Col 3:8 – Paul still admonishes us against wrath: *“…but now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth.”*

**First Thessalonians**

Wrath is used three times about “being saved from the wrath to come”:

1. 1 Thes 1:10 – *“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”*
2. 1 Thes 2:16 – deals with the judgment of the Jews, and though it seems that wrath has come up on them, “*by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved -- so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last,”* but the ending is better seen at the end of time not now. This has nothing to do with the fear of Anti-Semitism but because some Jews throughout history have accepted Christ.
3. 1 Thes 5:9 – If god has destined us not for wrath then we have nothing to fear at all, *“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Since this destination takes place in Jesus, we should be free from fear.

**Conclusion**

1. Please read your bible carefully and avoid taking words out of context.
2. Grammar should be supported by history of both Testaments and Christian history.
3. Do not accuse the writer of the above note using words and titles which are sadly insulting and still used in our Christian assemblies. I am only a Christian and any other title including my Ph.D. is dust.
4. If you can prove from the bible alone not from the writings of others that I am wrong, I will correct myself and love you more.

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