

Raised With Christ
Colossians 3:1-8

April 11, 2021

1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8 But now you must get rid of all such things - anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth (NRSV).

We have covered a lot this year; the baptism of Jesus, his successful rejection of the strongest of temptation, and recruiting the disciples. We have covered his path around the lake of Galilee and throughout the countryside, including areas outside of Palestine and his deliberate journey to Jerusalem. We have seen his problems with crowds and having to cross the sea to escape from them. We have seen multiple miracles; feeding thousands, healing many that are blind, lame, and sick, and we have seen Jesus perform exorcisms. We have seen Jesus go from one village to another and talk in parables. We have seen the religious leaders challenge his status and Jesus call them out for hypocrisy. We have learned the true nature of Jesus and his challenge to the disciples to be like him as a servant of all. We have seen the conflict develop with the religious leaders. We have seen the decline of discipleship where his closest followers argue over greatness, deny him in his hour of need, and run away in fear. We have seen a great crowd of people want to make him a king and then turn against him. We were with Christ at the Last Supper where he sets up the sacrament for us to remember him by. We witnessed the betrayal, illegal arrest, illegal trial, brutality, death and finally the resurrection.

The writings of the Apostle Paul were personal letters. He had no idea that they would be considered scriptural. His mission is to go throughout the civilized world and educate people about Jesus - who Jesus is and the Good News that he has been raised. And in so doing, the Apostle Paul also teaches us what our response to Christ should be. It is very important to understand three fundamental parts of the lesson for today. One is that Christ has been resurrected. This goes unquestioned in Paul's writings. Paul's lesson is built on his own personal knowledge that Christ has been raised and this knowledge is stated as fact. The second fundamental element of Paul's lesson is that the Christian is raised with Christ. Jesus is our role model and teacher. He teaches us about righteousness and the necessity of devotion. Your identity is a new identity that is like Christ. This means a lot of things and it includes a lot of things. We have died with Christ (Colossians 2:20-23) and we are raised with Christ. This creates a new worldview of the self. Your identity, the way you see yourself and identify yourself is with Christ. The third fundamental element is that our behavior changes now that we have Christ living within us. Since we have been raised with Christ, we now seek the things that are above and look to the heavenly realm. Believers no longer belong to world. No longer do we seek things of the earth. Now, risen with Christ, we can resist the list of vices; fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language.

How do we do this? How do we live a life without any vices? I think the most common effort results in failure. That is when you make a list of particular vices and make a promise not to do them. Then we get busy in life, get distracted, temptation hits and catches you by surprise and the next thing you know, you end up in some form of sin. That's OK, we have grace, so we

repent and make another promise, and the cycle repeats. This behavior is actually an abuse of grace. But that is what most people do. It's a losing battle like trying to diet. Dieting is an internal battle between giving up the food that you enjoy for better health. The battle is between short term, instant gratification and long term, delayed gratification. The goal is to have good health and feel better and live longer. But the battle is lost because of the power of desire. Chocolate ice cream can trigger a desire that is strong enough to overpower your health conscious will power. Temptation has a short burst of power. It is the same with any addiction whether it is food, drugs, alcohol, sex, spending, hoarding, or gambling. It is a matter of instant pleasure at the expense of long term happiness. As temptation pulls you off of your goal, it becomes self perpetuating; the more you do it, the more you need it. However, there is a better way. Christ demonstrates the best example of overcoming temptation through his action. When Satan took Jesus to face temptation, there was no desire at all in Jesus to give in to the temptation. The Jesus way is to have a complete focus on the heavenly realm. When you live in the heavenly realm there simply is no desire for the vices of the earth. The heavenly realm is like a magnet that pulls you in one direction and it has power over temptation instead of temptation having a sudden burst of power over you. Trying to fight temptation is a frustrating struggle that most of us lose. But living with Christ is a joyous journey where temptation has no power over you because you are internally and eternally satisfied.

I heard about a church here in Virginia, I don't remember the name or the location. The Bishop passed out green play money and instructed the congregation that if you find a bill with his initials on the back then you win some money but you must be in church in order to win. The result is that attendance doubled. Now when I first heard the story it presented a big problem for me because attendance was motivated by the wrong reasons and numbers were more important to them than doctrine. The worship experience is about God and our being faithful to God. I could easily guarantee you 1,000 new people here on Sunday morning. We would have to use the sanctuary, all classrooms, and the fellowship hall. It would be 1,000 new people that have never been here in worship before. All I need for it to work is \$100,000 for a promotional campaign. I could give \$100 to anyone that has never been here before and you would have 1,000 people here. But the problem is that they would be stuck on the greed of verse 5. They would be in church but they would not be there to worship. One day I put a similar situation to the test. One Sunday morning I was teaching the Chi Rho Sunday school class. To demonstrate a lesson on greed I put dollar bill on table in front of the class with the challenge for that dollar bill to still be there on the next Sunday morning. I dismissed the class and I was the first one to leave the classroom. When I went back to the classroom after worship, the dollar bill was gone.

The challenge for us is to put God first. It is a matter of where your heart is. When you are focused on God, Jesus, and the heavenly realm, it is a force that pulls you in the right direction and whenever there is a force that pulls people toward temptation, it has no power over you because you are raised with Christ.