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Homes Built on GRACE & TRUTH
Who is man? Conflict Over Morality And Need

WORD

(You are welcome to gather in groups of 3 or 4 for all or part of this discussion.)

Read Colossians 3:1-10

Man's moral STATE results in Man's moral NEED.

Who is Paul writing to in this letter?

Talk about the significance of the word "since". The Greek literally means "if then you have been..."

Summarize this section of Paul's letter in one phrase.

Which of the action words (verbs) stand out to you as you reflect on this passage?
(*for example: "set your sights", "Think about the things of heaven", "put to death", "have nothing to do" "put on your new nature",*)

Why do you suppose these action words stand out to you?

What is one practical thing you can do this week to put your action word of choice into practice?

[MacLaren's Expositions](#)

Colossians

RISEN WITH CHRIST

[Colossians 3:1-2.](#)

There are three aspects in which the New Testament treats the Resurrection, and these three seem to have successively come into the consciousness of the Church. First, as is natural, it was considered mainly in its bearing on the person and work of our Lord. We may point for illustration to the way in which the Resurrection is treated in the earliest of the apostolic discourses, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Then it came, with further reflection and experience, to be discerned that it had a bearing on the hope of the immortality of man. And last of all, as the Christian life deepened, it came to be discerned that the Resurrection was the pattern of the life of the Christian disciples. It was regarded first as a witness, then as a prophecy, then as a symbol. Three fragments of Scripture

express these three phases: for the first, 'Declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead'; for the second, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept'; for the third, 'God hath raised us up together with Him, and made us sit together in the heavenly places.' I have considered incidentally the two former aspects in the course of previous sermons; I wish to turn at present to that final third one.

One more observation I must make by way of introduction, and that is, that the way in which the Apostle here glides from 'being risen with Christ' to where 'Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God,' confirms what I have pointed out in former discourses, that the Ascension of Jesus Christ is always considered in Scripture as being nothing more than the necessary outcome and issue of the process which began in the Resurrection. They are not separate facts, but they are two ends of one process. And so with these thoughts, that Resurrection develops into Ascension, and that in both Jesus Christ is the pattern for His followers, let us turn to the words before us.

Then we have here

I. The Christian life considered as a risen life.

Now, we are all familiar with the great evangelical point of view from which the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are usually contemplated. To many of us Christ's sacrifice is nothing more or less than the means by which the world is reconciled to God, and Christ's Resurrection nothing more than the seal which was set by Divinity upon that work. 'Crucified for our offences, and raised again for our justification,' as Paul has it--that is the point of view from which most evangelical or orthodox Christian people are contented to regard the solemn fact of the Death and the radiant fact of the Resurrection. You cannot be too emphatic about these truths, but you may be too exclusive in your contemplation of them. You do well when you say that they are the Gospel; you do not well when you say, as some of you do, that they are the whole Gospel. For there is another stream of teaching in the New Testament, of which my text is an example, and a multitude of other passages that I cannot refer to now are equally conspicuous instances, in which that death and that Resurrection are regarded, not so much in respect to the power which they exercise in the reconciliation of the world to God, as in their aspect as the type of all noble and true Christian life. You remember how, when our Lord Himself touched upon the fruitful issues of His death, and said: 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit,' He at once went on to say that a man that loved his life would lose it; and that a man that lost his life would find it, and proceeded to point, even then, and in that connection, to His Cross as our pattern, declaring: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be.'

'Made like Him, like Him we rise; Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.'

So, then, a risen life is the type of all noble life, and before there can be a risen life there must have been a death. True, we may say that the spiritual facts in a man's experience, which are represented by these two great symbols of a death and a rising, are but like the

segment of a circle which, seen from the one side is convex and from the other is concave. But however loosely we may feel that the metaphors represent the facts, this is plain, that unless a man dies to flesh, to self-will, to the world, he never will live a life that is worth calling life. The condition of all nobleness and all growth upwards is that we shall die daily, and live a life that has sprung victorious from the death of self. All lofty ethics teach that; and Christianity teaches it, with redoubled emphasis, because it says to us, that the Cross and the Resurrection are not merely imaginative emblems of the noble and the Christian life, but are a great deal more than that. For, brethren, do not forget--if you do, you will be hopelessly at sea as to large tracts of blessed Christian truth--that by faith in Jesus Christ we are brought into such a true deep union with Him as that, in no mere metaphorical or analogous sense, but in most blessed reality, there comes into the believing heart a spark of the life that is Christ's own, so that with Him we do live, and from Him we do live a life cognate with His, who, having risen from the dead, dieth no more, and over whom death hath no dominion. So it is not a metaphor only, but a spiritual truth, when we speak of being risen with Christ, seeing that our faith, in the measure of its genuineness, its depth and its operative power upon our characters, will be the gate through which there shall pass into our deadness the life that truly is, the life that has nought to do with death or sin. And this unity with Jesus, brought about by faith, brings about that the depths of the Christian life are hid with Christ in God, and that we, risen with Him, do even now sit 'at the right hand in heavenly places,' whilst our feet, dusty and sometimes blood-stained, are journeying along the paths of life. This is the great teaching of my text, and of a multitude of other places; and this is the teaching which modern Christianity, in its exclusive, or all but exclusive, contemplation of the Cross as the sacrifice for sin, has far too much forgotten. 'Ye are risen with Christ.' ...

Let me turn, secondly, to

II. The consequent aims of the Christian life.

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.' 'To seek' implies the direction of the external life toward certain objects. It is not to seek as if perhaps we might not find; it is not even to seek in the sense of searching for, but it is to seek in the sense of aiming at. And now do you not think that if we had burning in our hearts, and conscious to our experiences, the sense of union with Jesus Christ the risen Saviour, that would shape the direction and dictate the aims of our earthly life? As surely as the elevation of the rocket tube determines the flight of the projectile that comes from it, so surely would the inward consciousness, if it were vivid as it ought to be in all Christian people, of that risen life throbbing within the heart, shape all the external conduct. It would give us wings and make us soar. It would make us buoyant, and lift us above the creeping aims that constitute the objects of life for so many men.

But you say, 'Things above: that is an indefinite phrase. What do you mean by it?' I will tell you what the Bible means by it. It means Jesus Christ. All the nebulous splendours of that firmament are gathered together into one blazing sun. It is a vague direction to tell a man to shoot up, into an empty heaven. It is not a vague direction to tell him to seek the 'things

above'; for they are all gathered into a person. 'Where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God,'--that is the meaning of 'things above,' which are to be the continual aim of the man who is conscious of a risen life. And of course they will be, for if we feel, as we ought to feel habitually, though with varying clearness, that we do carry within us a spark, if I might use that phrase, of the very life of Jesus Christ, so surely as fire will spring upwards, so surely as water will rise to the height of its source, so surely will our outward lives be directed towards Him, who is the life of our inward lives, and the goal therefore of our outward actions?

Jesus Christ is the summing up of 'the things that are above'; therefore there stands out clear this one great truth, that the only aim for a Christian soul, consistent with the facts of its Christian life, is to be like Christ, to be with Christ, to please Christ.

Now, how does that aim--'whether present or absent we labour that we may be well pleasing to Him'--how does that aim bear upon the multitude of inferior and nearer aims which men pursue, and which Christians have to pursue along with other men? How does it bear upon them?--Why thus--as the culminating peak of a mountain-chain bears on the lower hills that for miles and miles buttress it, and hold it up, and aspire towards it, and find their perfection in its calm summit that touches the skies. The more we have in view, as our aim in life, Christ who is 'at the right hand of God,' and assimilation, communion with Him, approbation from Him, the more will all immediate aims be ennobled and delivered from the evils that else cleave to them. They are more when they are second than when they are first. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,' and all your other aims--as students, as thinkers, as scientists, as men of business, as parents, as lovers, or anything else--will be greatedened by being subordinated to the conscious aim of pleasing Him. That aim should persist, like a strain of melody, one long, holden-down, diapason note, through all our lives. Perfume can be diffused into the air, and dislodge no atom of that which it makes fragrant. This supreme aim can be pursued through, and by means of, all nearer ones, and is inconsistent with nothing but sin. 'Seek the things that are above.'

Lastly, we have here--

III. The discipline which is needed to secure the right direction of the life.

The Apostle does not content himself with pointing out the aims. He adds practical advice as to how these aims can be made dominant in our individual cases, when he says, 'Set your affections on things above.' Now, many of you will know that 'affections' is not the full sense of the word that is here employed, and that the Revised Version gives a more adequate rendering when it says, 'Set your minds on the things that are above.' A man cannot do with his love according to his will. He cannot say: 'Resolved, that I love So-and-So'; and then set himself to do it. But though you cannot act on the emotions directly by the will, you can act directly on your understandings, on your thoughts, and your thoughts will act on your affections. If a man wants to love Jesus Christ he must think about Him. That is plain English. It is vain for a man to try to coerce his wandering affections by any other course than by concentrating his thoughts. Set your minds on the things that are above, and that will consolidate and direct the emotions; and the thoughts and the

emotions together will shape the outward efforts. Seeking the things that are above will come, and will only come, when mind and heart and inward life are occupied with Him. There is no other way by which the externals can be made right than by setting a watch on the door of our hearts and minds, and this inward discipline must be put in force before there will be any continuity or sureness in the outward aim. We want, for that direction of the life of which I have been speaking, a clear perception and a concentrated purpose, and we shall not get either of these unless we fall back, by thought and meditation, upon the truths which will provide them both.

Brethren, there is another aspect of the connection between these two parts of our text, which I can only touch. Not only is the setting of our thoughts on the things above, the way by which we can make these the aim of our lives. They are not only aims to be reached at some future stage of our progress, but they are possessions to be enjoyed at the present. We may have a present Christ and a present Heaven. The Christian life is not all aspiration; it is fruition as well. We have to seek, but even whilst we seek, we should be conscious that we possess what we are seeking, even whilst we seek it. Do you know anything of that double experience of having the things that are above, here and now, as well as reaching out towards them?

I am afraid that the Christian life of this generation suffers at a thousand points, because it is more concerned with the ordering of the outward life, and the manifold activities which this busy generation has struck out for itself, than it is with the quiet setting of the mind, in silent sunken depths of contemplation, on the things that are above. Oh, if we would think more about them we should aim more at them; and if we were sure that we possessed them to-day we should be more eager for a larger possession to-morrow.

[Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers](#)

(1-4) As the partaking of the death of Christ taught the negative lesson of death to the Law, so the partaking of His resurrection teaches the positive lesson of the spiritual life. We observe that this celebrated passage occupies a place at the close of the doctrinal portion of the Epistle, exactly corresponding to the even greater passage on the unity of the Church in God in the Epistle to the Ephesians ([Ephesians 4:1-16](#)). It is unlike that passage, because, summing up the main teaching of this Epistle, it dwells simply on the close personal relation of all souls to God in Jesus Christ, who is at once "the image of God," and the one Mediator between God and man. It is like it (and like other passages of the Epistles of the Captivity) because it passes on from Christ risen to Christ in heaven: it takes for granted our being risen with Christ, and bids us in heart to ascend to heaven now, and look forward to the bliss of heaven in the hereafter.

(1) **If ye then be risen** (rather, *ye rose*) **with Christ**.—In these words is marked the beginning of the spiritual life, referred evidently to baptism. (See [Colossians 2:12](#).) It is a "resurrection with Christ" and in Christ; as such it is dwelt upon in detail in [Romans 6:1-14](#). We may note that this phrase, implying a sudden passing from death unto life, accords more exactly with the idea of adult baptism, accepted in conscious faith, and leading at once to a new

life; while the later phrase, “regeneration” ([Titus 3:5](#)), which speaks of the soul as passing, indeed, at once into a new condition, but as having only the undeveloped germ of the new life, corresponds more closely with the idea of the infant baptism, which gradually superseded the other. Here this spiritual resurrection is taken for granted, and the Apostle goes on at once to the next stage of the spiritual life.

Christ.—The name, four times repeated, has in all cases the article prefixed to it. Evidently it used emphatically to refer to our Lord, as our Mediator—our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Seek those things which are above . . . set your affection on things above.—Here we have the spiritual life in its continuance. It is described, (1) first, as “seeking the things above”—that is, looking, and so growing, to perfection. This characteristic is dwelt upon with great fulness and beauty in [Philippians 3:12-16](#). (2) Next, in a still higher strain, as “setting our affection on the things above,” or, more properly, *catching the spirit of the things above*, being “heavenly-minded” already—anticipating heaven, not only in hope, but in tone and temper, seeing things as God sees them, and seeing all in relation to Him. On this we may again compare the great passage in [Philippians 3:20-21](#), on our “citizenship of heaven.” Of such heavenly-mindedness we have, perhaps, the most perfect specimen in the calm and loving certainty of St. John’s Epistles. (3) These two graces must be united. In the one is the secret of growth, in the other the present earnest of perfection. Moreover, the higher grace must follow from the former; “for, where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.”

Where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.—The allusion is emphatic. Heaven is to us, in itself, a vague expression of unknown bliss. It is made definite to the Christian by the thought of Christ. in His glorified humanity, there enthroned in majesty, “preparing a place for us,” and drawing us to be with Him. (Note a similar emphatic reference in [Philippians 3:21](#); and comp. [Ephesians 2:6](#), “He raised us up, and made us to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”)

This glorious idea of Christ in heaven, and heaven in Christ, runs through the whole book of the Revelation of St. John, from the opening Epistles to the last vision of glory.

PRAY

Confess YOUR need for this kind of ongoing active approach to living out your God-given faith in Jesus. Pray for YOUR spiritual rhythms and patterns to be vibrant and sustained.

LOVE

You have this need. Do you know anyone else who has expressed this need to you? What can you do to help them?

