

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	75		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Colossians 3:1-17		
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Truth Telling

Lords Day 43

Question 112. What is required in the ninth commandment?

Answer: That I bear false witness against no man, (a) nor falsify any man's words; (b) that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; (c) that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard; (d) but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, (e) unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; (f) likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; (g) also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbour. (h)

(a) Prov.19:5 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. Prov.19:9 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish. Prov.21:28 A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly. (b) Ps.15:3 He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. Ps.50:19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Ps.50:20 Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. (c) Rom.1:29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Rom.1:30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, (d) Matt.7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. Matt.7:2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Luke 6:37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: (e) John 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (f) Prov.12:22 Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight. Prov.13:5 A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame. (g) 1 Cor.13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Eph.4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. (h) 1 Pet.4:8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

I. THE EXHORTATION TO THINGS ABOVE (Col. 3:1-2)

A. The exhortation to seek.¹ Paul's view of things is directly opposed to the modern view of things. The modern life is a secular life, engrossed in the fleshly, the material, the psychological, and occasionally the philosophical things. Entertainment and indulgence are glorified in the media—on the pages of the newspapers, on television, in the literature—and the church is not unaffected. Entertainment is the key to success in the

religious world, too, and evangelicals, sadly, are often the ones leading the parade. In fact, evangelicals are in the vanguard of the secularizing of our society, while all the time decrying it. Paul followed in the steps of our Lord who said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matthew 6:19-20). The exhortation to seek the things above begins with the conditional clause, “if ye then be risen with Christ.” The construction is such that the apostle does not doubt the fact that the believers have been raised with Christ. The “if” is that of the assumption of the reality of the statement, as is plain from verse twelve (cf. v. 20). The apostle, then, assumes their resurrection with Christ, and on the basis of it calls upon them to “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” A person seeking after divine things is in itself remarkable, for elsewhere Paul says, “there is none that seeketh after God” (cf. Romans 3:11). Here, however, he refers to a seeking believer, not a seeking unbeliever. This is the only human search for God, and it is divinely initiated and motivated (cf. Philippians 2:12-13). The present tense in the verb, “seek,” indicates that this is to be a constant attitude. But what are the “things which are above”? Well, one thing we can say is this: They are things where Christ is at home, and where Christ is at work, or heavenly things. In this context, however, Paul had these three things in mind. (1.) He wished the Colossians to avoid the legalistic ceremonies and regulations of the Gnostic Judaizers, which forced them to grovel in earthly rules (cf. 2:16-23). The ceremonies, and the taboos, are dead! (2.) He wanted the Colossians to avoid the earthly lusts, the fleshly, materialistic, and humanistic passions, to which he refers, in the following verses (cf. 3:5-17). (3.) He was urging the Colossians to pursue the paramount things, the things that get “top billing in heaven”, to use the terms of the day. The psalmist would put it this way, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psalm 42:1).

B. The exhortation to set our minds² on things above. Paul begins this section, as Bishop Lightfoot suggests, by saying, “You must not only seek heaven; you must also think heaven.”³ As Augustine said, the soul is not where it *lives*, but where it *loves*. James Sire put it this way, “The Christian mind does not begin with a world view, not even the Christian world view. It begins with an *attitude*. Granted that attitude is rooted in the Christian world view, it is nonetheless first of all an attitude.”⁴ Heaven is to be the guide of life below. Thus, we are to accumulate possession in heaven (cf. Matthew 6:20). We are to value popularity with heaven (cf. John 12:43; II Timothy 2:4). The pleasures of heaven may be enjoyed even in the here and now (cf. Psalm 16:11). And we are to rejoice in our status in heaven (cf. Luke 10:20) and look forward to the prize of heaven (cf. Philippians 3:13-14). The basic reason for seeking heaven is not because of the pearly gates and streets paved in gold, but because heaven is “where Christ is”. The expression “seated at the right hand of God” points to the centrality and supremacy of Christ in the heavenly realm. Paul, of course, is not suggesting that temporal things are to have none of our attention, for that would be to say that we should have nothing to do with this life at all. What the apostle rejects is the *orientation* towards the world to which the Christian no longer belongs.

II. THE FOUNDATION OF THE EXHORTATION (Col. 3:3)

A. The death is past. The apostle writes, “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” The ground of this text is again the covenantal union, or the representative union, of the believers with Christ, their Head. With Him, we have died

(cf. 2:20). It is said that a believing Christian had put on his tombstone only these simple words, “Born Twice, Died Once.” Having died with Christ in His death, we shall not see death in its awful reality, as Jesus Himself said (cf. John 8:1). The physical death that we die is simply the means by which we pass into His presence. For those outside of Christ their tombstone should read, “Born Once, Died Twice.”

B. Our resurrection is past. As Paul states in verse one, we have risen with Christ. That is our spiritual position (Cf. Ephesians 2:6). Our bodily resurrection shall take place at His coming again.

C. Our future is assured. Paul writes, “your life is hid with Christ in God.” The clause suggests the thought of *secrecy*, for the secret springs of our life are hidden in God, from whom come all our aspirations, hopes, and enablings. The clause also suggests the thought of *identity*, for our ultimate relationship to God is known by God, being hidden even from the view of the saints themselves. The grounds for Paul’s admonition to aim at the things above, not those on earth, are twofold (v. 1, 3): first, the Colossians died to that old order with its elemental spirits (2:20), its ascetic and enslaving regulations, visionary experiences and useless will-worship. Second, as those who have already been raised with Christ they now participate in his resurrection life. So their lives are to be different. Their interests are to be centered on Christ; their minds, aims, ambitions, in fact their whole outlook, are to be centered on that heavenly realm where he reigns and where their lives truly belong. The continuous ongoing effort required for such a cast of mind does not come automatically. That realm above is to be sought diligently (and in contrast to any false seeking of heavenly experiences by the advocates of the Colossian “philosophy”) for this is where Christ is, seated as king in the place of honor.⁵

III. THE CULMINATION OF THE EXHORTATION (Col. 3:4)

A. The manifestation of Christ. The hidden life, Paul says, has its future unveiling. The root of spiritual life is found in the cross, but its fruit includes participation in the coming of Christ. As Paul says, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (v. 4). The “Sitting One” shall come. The Greek text by its use of an indefinite conjunction, rendered by “when”, suggests no specific date for His coming, but it plainly states that He *will come*. Christ is called by Paul in verse four, “our life”. He is that. He is our life in the sense that He stands for us as our Head, with His life given to us in regeneration, reckoned to us in justification, nourished in us by sanctification, and manifested at His coming in glorification.

B. The manifestation of Christians. Two remarkable phrases are here, “with him” and “in glory”. In fact, “with him”—“in glory”, makes a good exposition of what heaven essentially is, to be with Him in glory. What a glorious hope we have!

IV. THE NEW LIFE (*fait accompli*)

The word *protocol* refers to a proper way of behaving, a specific prescribed code of conduct that is expected, for example, of how a diplomat or an ambassador to another country behaves. In our passage the Apostle gives four direct imperatives in verses 2, 5, 8 and 9:

“Set your mind on the things above” (v. 2)

“Consider the members of your earthly body as dead” (v. 5)

“Put them all aside” (v. 8)

“Do not lie to one another” (v. 9)

In verses 12-17 there are eight more imperatives:

(v. 12) “put on a heart of...”

(v. 13a) “bear with one another...”

(v. 13b) “forgive one another...”

(v. 14) “put on love...”

(v. 15) “Let the peace of Christ rule...”

(v. 16) “Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you...”

(v. 17a) “do all thing in the name of the Lord Jesus...”

(v. 17b) “give thanks through Him...”

CONCLUSION: Noted New Testament scholar C.F.D. Moule helpfully remarked, “All this has been said because the passage to be studied is an example of the subtle interaction of the indicative and imperative of the Christian way. Another classic document for the inseparability of religion and ethics in the Christian way is First John: ‘We love, because he first loved us’ (1 Jn. 4:19); ‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another’ (1 Jn. 4:11). Colossians, in a quite different idiom, bears witness to the same ethic.”⁶

¹ The Greek word ΖĒTEŌ “seek” has particular reference to the orientation of the human will. It describes not just one aspect of life, but the decisive direction of the will, as a settled conviction cf. discussion in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* III ed. C. Brown (Zondervan, 1971), p. 532.

² The Greek word PHRONEŌ expresses not simply an activity of the intellect, but also a movement of the will; it has to do with aims and the motives underlying them cf. P.T. O’Brien, *Colossians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1982), p. 163.

³ J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (rpt. Zondervan, 1959), p. 207.

⁴ J.W. Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind: Learning to Love God In the Ways We Think* (IVP, 1990), p. 15.

⁵ Cf. O’Brien, p. 171.

⁶ C.F.D. Moule, “*The New Life*” in *Colossians 3:1-17* (in *Review & Exposition*, 1973), p. 482.