Colossians 3 – Seeking Those Things which are Above

In Colossians chapter 2, we have a description of how the believers, by becoming united to Christ, join themselves to a "body" which is "complete", having need of no other addition, whether it be from the Law, or the traditions of men. But in addition to this, believers who have become Christ's by passing through the watery grave of baptism, have become "circumcised" "in him" (Col 2:10-11). That is to say, their sins and iniquities – the works of the flesh have been effectively "cut off" in that representative grave – left behind, forsaken, as they commence a journey through a new life, wholly devoted to the things of God. The old man, "the body of the sins of the flesh" becomes crucified, put to death, and buried in baptism, as by the indwelling of the Spirit Word, a new man is formed, "which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him". And this is the theme of Chapter 3 – the manner in which, having laid aside the filthy garments of the flesh, believers ought to be clothed with righteousness, seeking the things which pertain to eternity. Having died, and risen up out of the baptismal waters, believers ought to seek things which are above, where their Lord is: "If ye then be risen with Christ, ***seek those things which are above,*** where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:1,2).

"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST"

Notice the contrast here with verse 20 of Chapter 2: "Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world (i.e. elementary principles of the *kosmos* that then was) why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances …". By becoming aligned with the death of Christ in Baptism, the Colossians had become free from the ordinances of the Mosaic Law – and the traditions which men had added to it. Yet through the Judaistic philosophising of the apostates, they were being seduced back to that which they had forsaken. They were turning back to unearth that which they had previously buried in the grave, and the Apostle exposed the vanity of such. So following the denunciation of the "philosophy and vain deceit" (2:8), of those who would lead the believers back to the ministration of death, Chapter 3 returns to the principles involved with baptism – and the responsibilities of being risen with Christ. The believer must not dwell so much upon what has been left behind – but more importantly, what lies ahead, and the obligations which go with newness of life in Christ.

> "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (3:1).

Lifting up their heads to gaze upon the things of eternity, those who are resurrected from their baptismal death, must fix their attention upon the Divine Presence – and the One who appears there "for us" (Heb 9:24).

Rather than to manifest the grovelling spirit of the natural man which, as that of the beasts of the field declines to earthly things, the spirit of the renewed man "goeth upward" (Eccl 3:21), focalising upon the place of favour and blessing – the Father's right hand, where our Lord is positioned. And in this, the example of our Lord is before us, who

always kept the things pertaining to His Father's Kingdom and Righteousness to the forefront of his mind, always seeking the will of His Father dwelling in the Heaven above:

> "I have set Yahweh always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved ... My flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore". (Ps 16:8-11).

In these words, the Spirit of Christ speaks prophetically of the meditations of our Lord Jesus, faced with the agony of Crucifixion. Elsewhere it is testified that he, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2). And this Psalm enlightens us as to what that "joy" was which was set before the Lord. "I have set Yahweh always before me", and positioned at His Right hand, the future seat of power upon which he would set, the Lord saw joy and pleasures: "in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore". So it was, that by continual meditation and reflection upon such a joyous vision of Glory – even His Father's Glory, our Lord was strengthened to overcome, enduring the shame of crucifixion that he might ultimately obtain that place of joy himself.

And even so it is with us. For the death of Christ was not the death of one individual – but that of all who are aligned with it in Baptism: "if one died for all, then were all dead" (2Cor 5:14). In our baptisms, we die with Christ. But for us, as with our Lord, crucifying the flesh is not a single event at the time of our immersion; but a daily struggle as we seek to "die daily" (1Cor 15:31). Thus the exhortation was given to the Colossians, that in seeking heavenly things – the "pleasures" at the Father's right hand – they must crucify earthly things: "mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness which is idolatry" (Col 3:5). As for those who have thus died in Christ therefore, they must put to death earthly things, and do as he did: focus instead on the Joyous Vision of the Divine Presence, and all that it speaks of. For if we are dead with him, then are we also risen with him (Rom 6:5), and our life is bound up in him: "for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). There is no earthly thing which appears in the presence of the Father – only things of the Spirit. And as our lives are "with Christ in God", who is the fountain-head of all life, then we ought to have no earthly thing dwelling in us. Only things of the Spirit – and how hard that is to maintain!

A CHANGE OF GARMENTS

In speaking of these principles, the Spirit through Paul adopted the language of clothing. A soiled, defiled garment is removed, that another robe of righteousness might be put on: "but now ye also ***put off*** all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth ... ***Put on*** therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering ..." (Col 3:8,12). So it is, that the varying attributes to be forsaken or adopted according to their nature, are likened to a garment being put off, or put on, as the case may be. The language here, finds

it's counterpart in a vision shown to Zechariah, relating to Joshua the High Priest and his change of raiment, typical of the change of our Lord's nature:

> "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And Yahweh said unto Satan, Yahweh rebuke thee, O Satan, even Yahweh that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was ***clothed with filthy garments,*** and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him saying, ***Take away the filthy garments from him.*** And unto him, he said, Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of Yahweh stood by" (Zech 3:3:1-5)

In this vision, we have depicted a change of garments taking place – immediately following a contention between one styled "Satan", and the other styled "Joshua the high priest". It is a vision over which so many expositors are caused to stumble – and no wonder, for the commentaries are written by those of the Apostasy; believing in devils, demons and hobgoblins – fire and brimstone for the damned, and eternal bliss beyond the skies for the blessed. It is not surprising therefore, that they cannot behold the things pertaining to Divine Mercy, things which relate to the sacrifice of Christ. These things remain hidden to them, for they cannot permit the spirit word to permeate beyond the barrier of the flesh.

But all becomes clear when we recognise that the events thus transacted prophetically speak of our Lord Jesus – the antitypical Joshua, whom the apostle styles the "great high priest", and his victory over the greatest adversary of all. For just as one styled "Satan", is depicted as resisting Joshua clothed in defiled garments, even so there was a contest between "the devil" or diabolos, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who wore our defiled nature in order to overcome it: "forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). And just as the Satan was ultimately defeated by being given a Divine Rebuke, even so it was in the case of our Lord Jesus, for in him, the diabolos, or "the law of sin" was condemned and destroyed: "God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). Notice that point – God condemned Sin in the flesh of his Son. To wear the defiled garments of our nature was essential for such to take place, for sin could not be condemned in the Son, unless it existed there.

What then of the change of raiment? Following his emergence from Joseph's tomb, the Lord Jesus received a change of nature, that he might no longer have to contend against the devil within. The garments pertaining to his mortal existence were left behind, to be discovered by Simon Peter at his entrance into the Lord's grave (Jno 20:4-7). The Lord had been "clothed upon" (2 Cor 5:4) with immortality, having no need for the former things relating to his past existence, and so was beheld by Daniel, again in vision, as one "whose garment was white as snow" (Dan 7:9), free from any sign of defilement. And having overcome, just as Joshua was seen to be greater than the angels (he was crowned, not

the Angel, thereby speaking of his typical status over them) even so our Lord, in his elevated status following his resurrection, was crowned with glory, so that now "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour", "being made so much better than the angels" (Heb 2:9; 1:4), that he might lead many sons into victory.

THE HIGH PRIEST – A REPRESENTATIVE

In all these things, it is vital for us to note that the things which were done to the high priest were not for his benefit alone – but for the people whom he represented. By the very nature of that office, the High Priest appeared in the Divine Presence on behalf of, and as a representative of the people. And this being so, the things which he experienced in that office, represent the experiences of the People also. In short, if they wish to enter the Divine presence – if they wish to be represented in him, they must be as him. And so it is, that we must never lose sight of the practical exhortation which cries out loudly in every facet of the Atoning work of our Lord.

And it is these practical examples which are highlighted by the Apostle to the Colossians. A little reflection will confirm this. The true believers have died with Christ in baptism. They have risen with Christ in emerging from the baptismal grave. But Christ has arisen to be given garments white as snow – no longer tainted by "iniquity" (Zech 3:4), or the sinfulness of the nature he overcame. This, we cannot do, for the devil within is a hereditary problem – an inherent power bringing us into enmity with God – it will remain with us until we also receive a change to Immortality, when "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1Cor 15:53). How then can we stand justified in the Divine Presence?

The answer lies in the merciful kindness of the Almighty, extended to us in His Son. If we seek to do as he did; if we resolve to "put off the old man", and "put on" a new set of attributes, even as Paul exhorted the Colossians, the garments of Christ's righteousness may cover us also. We who are are baptised into him (Rom 6:3) have risen with him (Col 3:1). We are thus part of his "body" (Col 1:18,24). Our life is "hid with Christ" (Col 3:3). But he is clothed with garments "white as snow" – and therefore so are we. We are partakers of His righteousness by faith (Rev 7:14, Rom 4:1-8), for as the Father beholds the people's representative at His Right Hand, He beholds no spot, or wrinkle, nor any unclean thing, but purity and righteousness. Even so, though our sins were as scarlet before him, they have become white as snow (Is 1:18), covered over with the purity of the Lord Jesus. This then, presents a most powerful exhortation to all minds sensitive to Divine Things. Being thus cleansed, we must not allow our garments to be defiled. We must not clothe ourselves with the works of the flesh – for this is the Promise of Christ Himself: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias" (Rev 3:5-6).

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