

Theme; -New life new lifestyle

Today I'm preaching on St Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 3 verses 1 to 17. Colossae, which was situated in modern day Turkey, is today no more, due to earthquakes, that whole area is prone to earthquakes. St Paul had never been to Colossae, the area had been evangelised by others, possibly Epaphras who we heard about in chapter 1 who had informed St Paul that the church, while faithful in many ways, had problems of heresy.

I have tremendous admiration for St Paul, he packs so much information into his letters that to do them justice one has to look almost at each word or phrase in turn. The first part of verse 1 is really a confirmation that the once Jews and predominantly Gentiles who make up the church in Colossae were now baptised Christians, as St Paul says, "you have been raised with Christ," and in which case he adds, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." The word "seek" is present tense, In other words, Paul is telling these Christians to seek and to keep on seeking the things that are of God. It is a lifetime quest for all of us.

Verse 2 repeats verse one, to emphasize its importance, and when St Paul uses the phrase 'on things that are above,' he means concentrate on the word of God, that is, the gospel of Christ. Paul writes, "For you have died," verse three. For Gentiles, and many Jews, death was the end of all things, it brought everything to an end, but for the Christian it is merely the death of the old way of life, their old pagan or Jewish selves no longer exist, as Christians they have been raised to a new life in Christ. Paul adds, "And your life is hidden with Christ in God" My new life in Christ is also hidden and is only known by God and that is true for all of us, that is why only God can judge, because he is the only one who actually knows each one of us.

In verse 4 Paul writes, "When Christ who is your life is revealed." When we were baptised, we died to sin and were raised to Christ, at our baptisms we entered into eternal life, therefore for us death is merely the gateway to heaven, therefore it is quite valid to suggest that since baptism "Christ is our life," In Galatians chapter 2 verse 20 St Paul wrote, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." Therefore, when Christ is revealed then we also will be revealed.

Verse 5 says, put to death fornication, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed. Recently we have been dealing with Elijah in one and two kings and Elijah's great enemy was Jezebel who stood for fornication, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed. Now Elijah fought against Jezebel and now we hear of St Paul fighting against Jezebel in Colossae, and now it is our turn in our generation to fight against Jezebel, and it isn't easy because she has infiltrated our televisions, radio, and written material, and it is clear that she is very much alive and active wreaking havoc even among Christians, she is possibly our greatest enemy, and we need to pray against her continually.

In verse six we are told that the wrath of God will come on those who are disobedient. I do not wish to modify Paul's words at all, because that statement is true for all those, who in their pride and conceit, have no regard for the gospel of Christ. However, the truth is that we are all disobedient, as St John wrote, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And he goes on, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Now repentance, as I keep telling myself, is not being sorry, sorry is more about being found out. Repentance is more about a deep desire not to do it again, and genuine remorse when it all goes wrong as it surely does, and I speak for myself here, and I'm sure for many of you.

Paul writes in verse nine, "Now you must get rid of such things," that suggests that they have changed in some way and that what they were doing before the change was acceptable, but now that they have changed it is no longer acceptable, and of course the change is that they have gone from Jew and, as St Paul writes, 'Barbarian,' to Christians.

Paul is urging them to control their tempers, their wrath, their malice, slander, and abusive language. This may have been the language of their previous lives, when only strength and intimidation was the way forward, but in Christ it is unacceptable. Jesus said as recorded in Matthew chapter 5, "If you are angry with your brother you are liable to judgement." In St Paul's letter to the Galatians chapter 5, Paul includes idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies, and warns that those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

In Verse 9 Paul writes, "Do not lie to one another." Lie in this context also means cheat or defraud. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament honours truth, Jesus said as recorded in John chapter 8 verse thirty-two these words, "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Paul writes do not lie to one another because you have stripped off the old self and put on the new self, in other words gone from Jew or Barbarian to Christian. Paul is saying that in their previous life lying, cheating, or defrauding was their way of life but not now, now they must be honest with each other, because now they and we are all one family in the image of God. To verse nine, we could also add the joy of giving rather than taking, forgiving rather than avenging, because all such things should be a part of what we are under Christ.

St Paul finishes off this section at verse eleven by writing, "In that renewal, that is, as baptised Christians, there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, who were a nomadic people, slave and free, but Christ is all and in all." In other words, there are to be no more social differences, we are all equal under God. Verses 12 to 17 starts a new section by suggesting a new lifestyle for the Colossians a lifestyle built on love, his writing is much more encouraging, no longer is there any hint of criticism, by saying, 'don't do that,' but only good sound advice on how to progress in faith through love. Paul starts this section by assuring them that they are more than just ordinary people, that they are, "God's chosen ones,"

We have to be very careful how we deal with the phrase, ‘God’s chosen ones,’ because every human being is subject to God’s grace and mercy, and there are no exceptions to that; however, for those who have heard of Jesus, and who have a free will to accept or reject Christ in their lives and have responded to Christ’s call are God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, and holy means, ‘set apart for God.’

In verses 12 to 13 St Paul asks them and us to live with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forgiveness. These words, especially humility and meekness can be mistaken for weakness, but the truth is you have to be strong to be truly humble and meek. These verses are also clearly understood by anyone who is in a loving relationship, they are the ideal qualities for a happy lasting marriage and indeed for any loving relationship. As for forgiveness this is essential, because without forgiveness most relationships fail.

Verse 14 starts, “Above all, clothe yourselves with love.” Love in this case is agape love which is concerned for the wellbeing of the other person and is more about doing than about feeling. It doesn’t require that we approve of the actions of the person for whom we are extending our love, or even that we enjoy their company, agape love is unconditional. In St Paul’s letter to the Galatians chapter 5 verse twenty-two starts with these words, “By contrast the fruit of the Spirit is love,” and St Paul is talking about agape love here also, and in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 13 Paul writes, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.”

Verse 15 talks about peace and I spoke about peace in the second sermon on Colossians, if you remember in chapter one verse 20b the twelfth characteristic of Christ was that he has made peace through the blood of the cross. And I said that peace has its roots in the Hebrew word shalom, and that shalom can refer to an inner kind of peace, the kind of wellbeing that comes from a deep relationship with God, which can be shattered by sin but can be restored through repentance and God’s forgiveness.

Verse 15 ends, “And be thankful.” The ancient Israelites gave thank offerings with animal sacrifices at the Altar. Christians give thanks to God with the body and blood of Christ at the Lord’s table which we will be doing in a moment during this Eucharist service, thanking God for the revelation of eternal life.

Verse 16 instructs us to teach one another with all wisdom, but more importantly to worship God joyfully with hymns, spiritual songs and with gratitude in our hearts. Finally, Paul gives the great principle for living the Christian life, St Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,” “giving thanks to God the Father through Him,” and that’s our benchmark, only do the things you know our Lord Jesus would do himself.