

LSB Colossians 2:20 - 23 Christ Plus this, Christ minus that

NASB77 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

3:1 Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.

We began to work through this important passage of scripture last week, and I won't revisit much of the background context at the end of chapter 2 except to say that Paul is making a foundational comparative argument here. At the end of chapter 2; This is how the world rolls. This is how man made religion rolls. Comparative to chapter 3; This is how true christians roll.

These beginning verses of chapter 3 are the very heart of this letter to the Colossians, and indeed, they are the very heart of christianity in total, as a distinct movement, a group of separated people who hold Christ in common and who are divorced from and removed out of this world.

A sidebar; Already; For the first 3 centuries the church was not called the church. The word church comes from the influence of Constantine, after 321 AD. The term kuriakos which derives from two greek words, kurios,

Lord's, and oikos, house. Kuriakos becomes kirk, which gets anglicised to church.

But for the first 280 odd years we were known only as the ecclesia. Ecclesia, which is the greek term for called out ones. Christian assemblies and christians in general were known by their very distinction of being called out of this world. Ecclesia, called out ones.

Let me give you a working description of christians, and of collective christianity as a whole, according to what Paul says here, and then let's do some comparative thinking ourselves about what calls itself christian today and see if it aligns well with Paul's description 30 years into the project.

Paul says christians are a people set apart from and removed from this world. He says they have been spiritually circumcised. We won't consider the physicalities of jewish circumcision beyond saying that spiritual circumcision which is a spiritual operation on our hearts, our inner persons, makes us a distinct and separate group of people from the rest of the world that surrounds us, even as physical circumcision made the jews a distinct and set apart group. Christians have a distinction. We are set apart from the spiritually dead world by new inner life. Separated from this world where Satan is ruler. Removed.

Then Paul says we are baptised. Again it's a spiritual baptism. Physical immersion is simply a picture of our spiritual immersion INTO Jesus Christ. We are baptised, spiritually, into Christ. Immersed as it were, completely surrounded and enclosed in Christ.

In that baptism, spiritually, we died with Him, on the cross, and we left our sins behind, at that cross, fully paid for, and then we burst out of the grave, fully alive, with Christ in newness of life. Our sins are gone forever. Forgiven and left behind for all time, past, present, and future.

And in our newness of life, on this side of the grave, having been resurrected from spiritual death into a new spiritual life, with Christ, we are

clothed in His perfect righteousness. He is our brother and our friend and our God. He is Lord and Master over us whom He has purchased out of this world, with His blood.

The most used word in all of the new testament writings to describe our position under our Lord and Saviour is *doulos*. We are *doulos*'. That word is the greek word for a common slave. But there is no negative connotation in being a slave of Jesus Christ, because we are slaves of love. It is high privilege to be amongst the fellow slaves of Jesus. He is Lord of all creation.

That's our position. We are heirs who will reign with Him for eternity, but He is forever Lord and we are forever His slaves in a sweet slavery. We are removed from Satan's cosmos, this world, where we were previously slaves because of sin. We're slaves either way. Somebody's going to own you. Either Satan does because of your sin, or God does because He purchased you out of your captivity of sin.

So there are no free agents floating around. Only slaves, either to sin and eternal punishment for our rebellion, or to a loving God who sacrificed His own Son in order to purchase us out of that dungeon of sin.

Those are all Paul's arguments, his descriptors of christians. Everything I just said is biblical, it's classic Paul. But is any of it recognizable to what calls itself the "church" in 2025? If you walk up to your friends and family who claim to be christians, and try to communicate and fellowship on the level that Paul considered pedestrian and ordinary for all christians that he was writing to, is there a connection, or would you simply get a blank, puzzled, empty stare? Or worse.

What I'm saying is that what calls itself the church, in America, and indeed most of the world, is at such a low common denominator, that if they *are* christians, they don't have a clue why. Or how. And many who believe themselves to be christians, simply are fooled. Duped by a common denominator so low it's like the fish net Jesus spoke of in Matthew 13.

Mt. 13:47 *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Beloved, that dragnet is so-called "christendom". Everything and everyone that identifies somehow with Christ is not necessarily a christian. We see that shock and awe in Matthew 7 where Jesus argues with people who thought they were christians, but aren't. These are some of the scariest words, perhaps THE scariest words in the Bible. From Jesus lips;

Mt. 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’*

Those sobering thoughts about the distinctiveness of an actual relational connection to Jesus versus all of the man made nonsense that calls itself "christian" are our introduction to our passage this morning.

At the end of chapter 2, and we spent some quality time working through those verses last Sunday, and they're on line if you need to review again what we said. Because at the end of chapter 2 is phony man made religion. Do stuff. Don't do stuff. Man made baloney. Independent of Jesus and a real relationship with Him. Extrabiblical religiosity. The worlds religions are full of it. They don't have Jesus but they've replaced Him with the raz-ma-tazz.

So beginning in chapter 3 is the real that is in stark contrast, sharp distinction from the false.

3:1 Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ,

This is the most perfectly logical argument Paul can make, and yet it sounds like foolishness to the entire world around us. And sadly, most who call themselves christians don't have a clue what Paul means here.

Paul's entire working argument is that we are IN Christ. We are baptised, immersed INTO Christ. And He isn't here any more, is He? He arose from the dead and ascended into heaven. So Paul is utterly consistent in his logic. If you're IN Christ, and He's in heaven at the right hand of His father, where are you?

Well, according to Paul's logic, that's where I'm at. If Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of His Father, and I'm immersed into Him, then that's where I am too. I'm IN Christ, and logically, I've been raised up with Him to where He's at. And Paul will argue for a relationship with Jesus that is consistent with Him leaving this world and being in heaven.

And that's consistent with what He told His disciples on His last night on earth. They were panicked that He was leaving them behind in this world. Absolute panic. Jesus, gone! That's untenable. Impossible to fathom for these men. He says;

1 “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

If it's all about Jesus, being with Jesus, and He's gone to heaven to make a place there for me to dwell, and He's promised to return to earth and catch me away to be with Him in heaven, then, logically, this earth is an

incidental waiting place for what's next, with Him, in heaven.

Not quite. He gave us one job. You've got one job. Go into all the world and tell people about Jesus. You go tell everyone; What He's done. He made an escape hatch out of this condemned world. So while you're here, you've got one job. Tell others that Jesus has purchased reconciliation with God through forgiveness purchased by His blood.

That's to be our main focus while we wait, here. Everything else is second and incidental. Necessary, yes, but second, third, fourth place in order of importance. Our relationship to Jesus and our work here to advance His kingdom, His authority to reign, whatever gifts He endows on us to do that, is first. Abiding in this world is second, third, fourth.

Neither did He leave us here alone, as orphans. He sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us and with us. My heavenly connection to Jesus who is there while I'm still down here, is the indwelling Holy Spirit of Jesus. My Saviour lives inside my heart. The Holy Spirit enables me to make a spiritual difference in this world where I remain, temporarily.

So, how're we doing? How is my focus on job one. The Holy Spirit in me, using my mouth and His miracle of new birth to reproduce Him in others. I can only speak for me.

It's open enrollment, so I used up hours fiddling with my earthly cares. And I'm 73 so my 401K needed me to spend time fiddling with signatures. And a teenage girl backed into the door of my good truck so I fiddled with insurance companies and repairs.

Sorry, this sermon may be shorter than usual, because I'm so immersed in this world and all of it's fiddly stuff, it calls me away from heaven. There's christmas trees and firewood so I can stay warm, and christmas lights for the house, and, and, and, if I ever get caught up with all the necessary stuff, there's an utterly ridiculous 1939 Ford in the back yard that requires hours upon hours of work. And there's moonlight electrical jobs to get some mad

money to spend on foolish old Fords.

And I'm pretty sure, Jesus is going to gather me to Himself, in the air and He's going to say; Really?? Really Jim??? You squandered time and money on this stuff?? It's going to be burned up. What part of what Paul wrote to the Colossians in chapter 3 did you not understand?? It's laid out pretty simple.

3:1 Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Have you met the occasional christian that's actually serious about what Paul ordered every christian to do here? They're rare. And the rest of us stand around and say, *Ohhh, he's so heavenly minded, he's no earthly good.*

I met one of those guys, what is it, maybe 12 years ago. He was just finishing up his seminary degree at Master's seminary, and gathering steam to get him and his family to India where he planned to begin a work there for Jesus. I recognized his singularity of focus, and his powers of a brilliant mind, trained totally on Jesus, and I brought you folks along to support him and his family with a few bucks each month. Daniel and Jhansy Avula.

God is blessing that effort so much that tables may turn and they may have to support us one of these days. God's using him to do mighty things in India.

I met a lady, right here in this corner of the world, who spends every hour of every day working to bring a knowledge of Jesus and His forgiveness to local women and children. Her name is Larisa. We should all follow her example. 24-7-365 christians. Slaves for Jesus. The necessary stuff of this world is incidental.

3:1 Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the

things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Maybe that's optional. Two tiered christianity. Ordinary selfish useless fruitless christians, like me, the normal tier, and super christians, that take Pauls words here as non optional.

The phrasing does allow for options. See it right there after the word, therefore. It's the word IF.

The option is IF you're a christian, or not. Sorry if I'm scaring you. I'm scaring me too. What Paul writes here is normative for every single believing regenerated from death to life, in Jesus, Christian. FAsTen your seat belts. We haven't even gotten to the scariest verse yet;

3 For you died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.

There's actually some comfort in that verse. If it was up to me to get the christian life right, I'd mess it up . . . for good. Lucky for me, I'm in Christ, and I died. I can't ultimately mess it up.

Oh, there's going to be quite a bonfire of all the non christ related nonsense I've accumulated on this earth. The wooden station wagon has got some BTU's for sure. And the Model T is just tin nailed onto a wood frame.

But, even with all of my failings, I know that I died, and my life is hidden with Christ, in God. I have comfort in that confidence. But I also have anxiety that all of the nonsense I hold onto in this world, needs to die to me and me to it.

So we land at a conundrum. In this book we have a conflict often between what we call positional truth and practical truth.

Positionally, I am IN Christ. Immersed into Him by spiritual circumcision and baptised spiritually into His death. I left all of my sins there, in His

broken dead body, on that cross, paid for in full. And then still immersed in Him, I burst out of the grave, bought, paid for, redeemed, and clothed in white garments. He gave me His righteousness.

That's positional truth. But practical truth, while I wait here, for Him to call me home, whether on this side of the dirt or the other, which is getting closer by the day, the practical truth is I fail. Daily. Yet He continues to sustain and forgive.

Last Sunday, as we were leaving, I had the pleasure of sharing the comfort portion of this verse, with Josh. *3 For you died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.*

Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer used this verse in Colossians as inspiration to write the hymn, A wonder Saviour is Jesus my Lord. She wrote;

*He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock
That shadows a dry, thirsty land;
He hideth my life in the depths of his love
And covers me there with his hand,
And covers me there with his hand.*

Those words bring 3 beautiful Old Testament stories to life. The first may not immediately come to mind, but it's at the Abrahamic covenant. The sacrificial animals all split into equal halves. The ancient practice of men making an unbreakable pact by walking together between the split animal sacrifices.

But when God promised Abraham future blessing, Abraham didn't walk through the split apart animals with God. God put Abraham into a deep sleep, a deep rest, and God walked through alone. No human counterpart to break the promise by failing. Those promises are unconditional. God walked through there, alone, while Abraham slept peacefully, hidden, as it were in the safety of God.

Then we think of Moses, at the giving of the law. Let me read that passage to you from Exodus 33;

18 Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!" 19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." 20 But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" 21 Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; 22 and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. 23 "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

The idea of the terror of standing alone before God as opposed to being hidden in Christ. There is great comfort. One more old testament story that I love, because I can identify with the prophet's failure.

This is Elijah. And Elijah is melting down. The most powerful and frightening prophet who ever lived, terrorized by a wicked little girl. Jezebel. She hates him and swears that by this time tomorrow he'll be dead. So Elijah flees for his life.

The same Elijah who just called fire down from heaven that lapped up the rocks that the altar was built out of. That Elijah, who slew all of the false prophets. And Jezebel says she'll have him dead by this time tomorrow and he flees. Definitely, a melt down. He never recovered. Not really. God sent a chariot to catch him up to heaven, but the mantle of prophet passed to Elisha.

But while Elijah's hiding and trembling from the threat of a little girl, after the ravens feed him for a while, he ends up in a cave. And let me read you just a little part of the story. 1 Kings 19:

9 Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." 11 So He said, "Go forth, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. 13 And it came about when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

15 And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "And it shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Massive powers amidst massive failure. God sticks Elijah into the safety of a cave where he watches the mountains melt from the winds of God's fury, and an earthquake and a fire burns everything up. God puts His power on display, and then he comes to Elijah in a still small voice, a lovely breeze.

God protects Elijah in the cleft of a rock while the mountains melt and the

earthquake comes and the fire finishes the destruction, but His still small voice has more power than all of it. God is sovereign over all of it. Not a hair of your head will perish, until and unless God gives the command.

3 For you died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.

That should give a whole new meaning to grateful dead. Positionally, in Christ, I am in a protected place. Hidden in Christ, in heaven. Soon the positional truth will become practical truth.

4 When Christ, who is our life, is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.

I feel bad for all the guys who are too smart to believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. Too sophisticated. The protestant elite. I watch them on you tube smugly patting each other on the back about how us dumb low church recovering dispensationalist fundamentalists believe Christ is going to show up, mid heaven, and we all, alive or asleep in Christ, will hear the words that John the apostle got to hear ahead of time in Revelation chapter 4.

Come up here! Rev. 4:1 *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “**Come up here**, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”*

After what things? After the church in Revelation 2 and 3. After the rapture which just happened when He said, Come Up Here. Duh. Nice to be so dumb. It makes it so much more simpler. And logical. It all fits together so precisely. So perfectly.

Daniel 9:24 - 27. 70 weeks of years from a particular ruler's edict, a known space in historic time, 490 years until all things are fulfilled. 483 years to the day, Jesus is standing at the gate of Jerusalem weeping over the city and the people who will kill their Messiah.

That leaves 1 week of years remaining of Jacob's trouble . 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490. The parenthesis in between, almost 2000 years, is the church age. So, Israel's time. Prophecy. 490 years. 483 years Messiah the Prince is cut off. Killed. Then the church age which Israel never saw. A 2000 year parenthesis called, the church. Israel is set on a shelf. The gentile nations are brought in, evangelized by the church.

Then God calls the church home. Jesus in mid heaven says Come Up Here and the living and the sleeping in Christ all meet Him in the air, and we all go through that open door into heaven with our resurrection bodies.

After these things, to coin a phrase exactly as the voice in Revelation 4 said it, then that last 7 years on Israel's clock begins to count down to the cataclysmic end. The rapture is the cut off of church age and the re-instating of Israel's age.

1 Thess. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

You know, the reformed elite a-millennialists who dismiss Israel and all of God's promises to them as lost, displaced by the church, they also like to look down on us simpleton pre-millennial pre-tribulation rapture folks and say we make the rapture an escape hatch. It's our free ride ticket out of the tribulation. We're all just hoping for the bail out.

Wait, didn't Paul say *18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.* That's exactly what we're supposed to do.

3 For you died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.

I couldn't screw up my salvation if I tried. My eternal life, my regeneration, my salvation, my quickening from spiritual death to spiritual life is hidden with Christ, in heaven, with God. Totally out of my hands. If I could mess it up, I know very well, I would. But I didn't start it and I won't finish it. He does it all.

4 When Christ, who is our life, is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.

That's the next event on God's time clock. Nothing else has to happen before this calling of us, physically, out of this world, unto Himself.

OK, one thing does need to happen. But it only takes a nano second.

1 Cor. 15: 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

I believe this day is imminent.

Paul's message to us in these words we've looked at this morning is that the church is distinctly different and removed from the world around us. Set apart from this world, our home is in heaven, from which we await our Saviour.

The church, or what calls itself the church, in America, in 2025, is a group of people who are doing their best to look exactly like the world around them. We've gotten sold on the pragmatic idea that if we can somehow get the world to come in the doors, if we just make them comfortable in the church, never speak of sin or judgement or anything else that might trigger them, then somehow by osmosis, we're going to make them christians.

Loud music, dark stages, smoke machines, entertainers on a stage instead of congregational singing, short sermons with nothing to challenge lost sinners, we want you to feel better about yourself when you leave than when you got here. That's the modern recipe that calls itself christendom.

And if you said, that doesn't sound like Paul's description of church, the ecclesia, the called out ones, called out of this perishing world ones, described in Colossians 3:1 - 4, they might give you a confused look and say; Colossians? What's a colossian? Who is Paul? Paul who?

Then they might say "we're getting results." Lots of fish in the net, that will get discarded later? We want all the keeper fish to come and fellowship with us and stay.