

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 280 – October 7th – Colossians 3:1-17

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Colossians

Dunn, James D G *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996

Eadie, John *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, Richard Griffin & Co, 1856

Verse 1

Εἰ οὖν συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος·

συνηγέρθητε Verb, aor pass indic, 2 pl
 συνεγείρω raise together with

Cf. 2:20 and the note on 2:20-23. Those who have died with Christ have also been raised with him. Identification with him brings the believer into a new sphere of existence – a new life, a new perspective. The language remains, however, in one sense metaphorical in that literal resurrection belongs still to the future.

ἄνω from above

I.e. heavenly things.

ζητεῶ seek, search for, look for, attempt, ask, investigate

Dunn thinks that the sense here is "keep looking for' that which is of Christ or from heaven in the situations of daily living (cf. Matt 6:33; Rom 2:7; 1 Cor 10:24; Heb 11:4; 13:14; NIV's 'set your hearts on' is not quite right). What is in view is a complete reorientation of existence."

οὗ adv where

δεξιός, α, ον right, δεξιά right hand; δεξιας ἔδωκαν they shook hands
 καθημαι sit, sit down, live

Cf. Ps 110:1, the OT text most often alluded to in the New. The right hand of God is the position of power and authority. "The consequences for the Christian perspective are thus ... clear. If Jesus, the Christ, is so highly favoured and acknowledged to be God's 'right-hand man,' with all the power and authority to effect God's will and to protect his own which is implicit in that claim, then Christian life should be entirely oriented to this Christ." Dunn

Verse 2

τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,

φρονεῶ think, have in mind

The present tense has the force 'keep your minds fixed.'

γη, γης f earth

The Christian is called to a practical heavenly mindedness. "What is commended is not an apocalyptic or mystical preoccupation with the future of heaven, as 3:1 could be taken to imply (that might have conceded the ground already contested in 2:18 and 23), but a cast of mind, a settled way of looking at things, a sustained devotion to and enactment of a life cause." Dunn. The key is union with the risen Christ and a life which centres in him. "It is this Christ-perspective which should mark out the Colossian Christians' heavenly spirituality and enable them to see through the alternative spirituality of the Colossian philosophy." Dunn

Verse 3

ἀπεθάνετε γάρ, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ·

ἀπεθάνετε See 2:20

The aorist indicates "that the change of perspective marked by conversion-initiation is final and fixed. Nevertheless, throughout this section the balance between past act, ongoing outworking, and future completion is maintained." Dunn

ζωη, ης f life

κέκρυπται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s κρυπτω
 hide, conceal, cover

The true source of the Christian's life is hidden at present: it is in Christ and is from Christ. The imagery is apocalyptic: of something currently hidden in heaven which will be revealed (cf. v.4). "Paul and Timothy were evidently wholly confident that this perspective, this hidden resource, would provide all the wisdom needed to cope with the challenges and problems of daily living." Dunn. Cf. 2:2-3.

Verse 4

ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.

ὅταν when, whenever, as often as
 φανερωθῆ Verb, aor pass subj, 3 s φανερωω
 make known, reveal

ζωη, ης f life

Some MSS read ἡμῶν, a reading preferred by Dunn, despite ὑμῶν being more strongly attested, on the grounds that the text was more likely to have been altered from ἡμῶν to ὑμῶν to conform with the consistent second person plural of the paragraph. Translators and commentators are fairly evenly divided.

τοτε then, at that time

φανερῶθήσεσθε Verb, fut pass indic, 2 pl
φανεροῶ

He is our life in the sense that what he is we shall be. "The underlying motif ... is the thought of restoration of the divine image, as intended in the initial creation of humanity, and of the risen Christ as the 'firstborn' who gives the family image to the rest of the new humanity (see on 1:18 and 3:10)." Dunn

Verse 5

Νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
πορνείαν, ἀκαθαρσίαν, πάθος, ἐπιθυμίαν
κακὴν, καὶ τὴν πλεονεξίαν ἣτις ἐστὶν
εἰδωλολατρία,

νεκροῶ put to death

Cf. Rom 8:13. The call is to "forceful self-discipline," says Dunn who continues, "Paul and Timothy clearly did not harbour any illusions regarding their converts. They did not attempt to promote a Christian perspective which was unrelated to the hard realities of daily life. On the contrary, they were all too aware of the pressures which shaped people like the Colossian Christians and which still held a seductive attraction for them. They were concerned that the Colossian believers' death with Christ, the atrophy of old habits of evil, had not yet worked through the full extent of their bodily relationships."

μέλη Noun, nom/acc pl μέλος, οὐς n
member, bodily part

γη, γης f earth

πορνεία, ας f sexual immorality

Often linked with idolatry.

ἀκαθαρσία, ας f impurity, immorality,
uncleanness

πάθος, οὐς n lust, passion

ἐπιθυμία, ας f desire, longing, lust

κακός, η, ον evil, bad, wrong, harm

πλεονεξία, ας f greed, covetousness

ὅστις, ἣτις, ὅτι who, which

εἰδωλολατρία, ας f idol worship, idolatry

Cf. Eph 5:5.

Verse 6δι' ἃ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς
τῆς ἀπειθείας·

ὀργη, ης f wrath, anger

Cf. Rom 1:32; 1 Cor 5:9-13; 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Thess 4:3-6. "The verb (ἔρχεται) could denote a wrath already in operation – that is, presumably, as in Rom 1:18-32, in the consequences which follow from failure to acknowledge and worship God as God... In that case the wrath takes the form of God giving or allowing his human creatures what they want, leaving them to their own devices – the continuing avarice and abuse of sexual relations being its own reward. But the concept as taken over by the first Christians is more typically future oriented; so predominantly in Paul (Rom 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; 1 Thess 5:9). And the closest parallel (1 Thess 1:10: τῆς ὀργῆς τῆ ἐρχομένης; cf. Matt 3:7/Luke 3:7: 'the coming wrath') suggests that this is what is in view here – 'is going to come, is about to come.'" Dunn

The latter half of the verse is omitted by p⁴⁶ B and some versions. The phrase could have been added as an (unconscious) echo of Eph 5:6, but the opening of the following verse seems to require its inclusion. Translations and commentators are divided over whether to include the phrase.

ἀπειθεία, ας f disobedience

Verse 7ἐν οἷς καὶ ὑμεῖς περιπατήσατέ ποτε ὅτε ἐζήτε
ἐν τούτοις·

περιπατεῶ walk, walk about, live

ποτέ enclitic particle once, formerly, at one
time

ὅτε conj when, at which time

ζῶω live, be alive

"The point is that such behaviour used to characterise the Colossian Christians' way of life... Probably it was revulsion against such an ethos which attracted many Gentiles to the stronger morality of Judaism. But the pressures of the wider society were such that the temptation for Gentile Christians to relapse must have been fairly constant (cf. 1 Corinthians 5-6)." Dunn

Verse 8

νυνὶ δὲ ἀπόθεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς τὰ πάντα, ὀργὴν,
θυμὸν, κακίαν, βλασφημίαν, αἰσχρολογίαν ἐκ
τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν·

νυνὶ (originally an emphatic form of νυν)

now

Cf. 1:22. The emphasis is upon the radical change which has occurred – ὅτε ... νυνὶ δε – a change in standing which calls for a corresponding change in behaviour.

ἀπόθεσθε Verb, 2 aor midd imperat, 2 pl
ἀποτιθημι throw off, be done with, take off (clothes)

ὄρη, ης f see v.6

"What is in view is such a powerful emotion that only God can be trusted to exercise it fairly. Hence such warnings as Rom 12:19." Dunn

θυμος, ου m anger, rage, fury
κακια, ας evil, wickedness

Here may mean 'ill-will.'

βλασφημία, ας f slander, blasphemy
αἰσχρολογία, ας f obscene speech
στομα, τος n mouth, utterance

Verse 9

μη ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους· ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ,

ψευδομαι lie, speak untruth, deceive
ἀλλήλων, οἰς, οὖς reciprocal pronoun one another

Cf. Eph 4:25.

ἀπεκδυσάμενοι Verb, aor midd dep ptc, m nom pl ἀπεκδυομαι disarm; put off, discard

παλαιος, α, ον old, former
πραξις, εως f what one does, deed, action, practice

Paul's reference to the 'old man' and 'new' is linked with his understanding of Adam and of Christ, the 'first man' and the 'last'. In his death, Jesus stood in Adam's place and bore the penalty for his sin. By his resurrection he has become the head of a new humanity (see v.11). Those who are in Christ have died to, or put off the old man, the life that was theirs in Adam. Note the force of the aorist, this putting off is a once for all past act effected through union in Christ (and perhaps set forth in baptism). This being so, they are to demonstrate the reality of new life in Christ.

Verse 10

καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν,

ἐνδύω dress, clothe; midd put on, wear

"The complementary action to discarding old clothes is putting on new ones. Conversion was not simply a turning from an old way of life; it was also a positive embracing of a new way of life." Dunn

νεος, α, ον new, fresh, young

"Not simply individual virtues and graces are in view, but once again a whole personality and the social world and way of life that that implied (cf. the 'new creation' in 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15). The thought is equivalent to 'putting on Christ' in Rom 13:14, as Col 3:3-4 also implies. At its simplest, this means that the manner of Christ's living, as attested in the Jesus tradition, provided the pattern for this new self-life (2:6-7), as the enabling of the risen Christ provided its means (1:9-11)." Dunn

ἀνακαινούμενον Verb, pres pass ptc, m acc & n nom/acc s ἀνακαινώω renew, remake

Cf. 2 Cor 4:16 and Rom 12:2 for the cognate noun.

ἐπίγνωσις, εως f knowledge
εἰκὼν, ονος f likeness, image, form
κτίσαντος Verb, aor act ptc, m gen s κτιζώ create, make

There are echoes here of Gen 1:26f. It is in Christ that the image of God possessed at first by Adam, but lost or spoiled through sin, is now restored. "This has the effect of reminding the readers that Christian ethics is not a matter merely of individual resolve, but involves a corporate dimension; Adam christology leads directly into a theology of the body of Christ." Dunn. The new creation is corporate – a whole new world.

Verse 11

ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι Ἕλληνας καὶ Ἰουδαίους, περιτομὴν καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

Cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28.

ὅπου adv. where

The sphere in which that new life is to be lived out is the body of Christ, the church.

ἐνι there is (equivalent to ἐνεστί)

Bears the sense 'it is possible' hence the negated form here, 'it is impossible for there to be ...' "Not simply particular ethnic distinctions have been abolished, but the very possibility of such distinctions having any continuing meaning has ceased to exist." Dunn

Ἕλληνας, ηνος m a Greek, non-Jew
Ἰουδαίους, α, ον a Jew, Jewish, Judean

"Jew' (Ιουδαίος) was originally used by foreigners for a person belonging to Judea (Ιουδαία). But increasingly from the Maccabean period it had come to be accepted and used by Jews themselves as a self-designation, as a way of identifying themselves in relation to and in distinction from other nationalities... That this also involved a sense of distinctive religious identity is implied in the fact that the word became the basis of the new name for the religion of the Jews, 'Judaism' (Ιουδαισμός), which also emerged at this time." Dunn

περιτομή, ης f circumcison, those circumcised, Jews

ἀκροβυστία, ας f uncircumcision, non-Jews
βαρβαρος, ον non-Greek, uncivilized, foreigner, native

Σκυθης, ου Scythian (regarded by the Roman world as the absolute example of paganism)

There is no room for any sense of ethnic superiority.

δουλος, ου m slave, servant

ἐλευθερος, α, ον free, free person

"Apart from ethnic differences (and gender differences in Gal 3:28), the difference between slave and free was the other most fundamental division in society. Up to a third of those living in a city like Colossae may have been slaves... It was simply the means of providing labour at the bottom end of the economic spectrum (originally from the ranks of defeated enemies, but now mainly through birth to slaves). To sell oneself as a slave was a device of last resort for someone in debt, and slaves of important masters could exercise significant influence themselves... Christ has relativised all such distinctions, however fundamental to society, its structure, and its ongoing existence." Dunn

Verse 12

Ἐνδύσασθε οὖν ὡς ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἅγιοι καὶ ἡγαπημένοι, σπλάγγνα οἰκτιρμοῦ, χρηστότητα, ταπεινοφροσύνην, πραΰτητα, μακροθυμίαν,

ἐνδύσασθε Verb, aor midd imperat, 2 pl
ἐνδύω see v.10

The call of v.10 is repeated but is now detailed in terms of particular characteristics.

ἐκλεκτος, η, ον chosen

ἅγιος, α, ον holy, consecrated, set apart to/by God

ἡγαπημένοι Verb, perf pass ptc, m nom pl
ἀγαπαω love, show love for

These three terms have their background in OT descriptions of Israel.

σπλάγγνον, ου n one's inmost self, affections, heart

οἰκτιρμος, ου m compassion, mercy

'heartfelt compassion' cf. Phil 2:1, also of God's mercies in Rom 12:1 and 2 Cor 1:3.

χρηστοτης, ητος f kindness, goodness, mercy

A reflection of God's goodness, cf. Rom 2:4.

ταπεινοφροσυνη, ης f humility

Cf. Phil 2:3; Eph 4:2; 1 Peter 5:5.

πραυτης, ητος f gentleness, humility

Cf. 2 Cor 10:1.

μακροθυμια, ας f longsuffering, patience

"Such virtues (or graces), particularly as in the combination here, can appear to encourage a 'milk-sop' weakness as in people whose calling in life is to be a doormat for others – at least as those caught up in the cut and thrust of the rat race count strength. But in fact to live out such a character calls for a strength which is rarely seen in the marketplace (as Jesus demonstrated). And without such an attitude towards others no group of individuals can become and grow as a community, with a proper care for others and willingness to submerge one's own personal interests." Dunn

Verse 13

ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων καὶ χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς ἐάν τις πρὸς τινα ἔχη μομφήν· καθὼς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἐχαρίσατο ὑμῖν οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς·

ἀνεχομαι endure, be patient with

Cf. Mk 9:19; 2 Cor 11:1, 19; Eph 4:2.

ἀλλήλων, ος, ους reciprocal pronoun one another

χαριζομαι grant, give

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον reflexive pronoun, himself, herself, itself

Used here with the same sense as the reciprocal pronoun.

ἐαν if, even if

μομφη, ης f cause for complaint, complaint

Here only in biblical Greek. The meaning is 'ground of offence' or 'complaint'

"Only such mutual respect and support, such recognition of mutual vulnerability, such valuing of each other beyond individual hurts and faults, it is also implied, would retain weaker or wavering members who otherwise might find the old way of life or the more traditional Jewish alternative too attractive." Dunn. The life of the Christian community should be marked by an incomparable attractiveness.

οὕτως and οὕτω thus, in this way

Cf. Eph 4:32; 5:2,25,29; also Rom 15:7. On the interdependence between forgiveness and being forgiven cf. Matt 6:12, 14-15; 18:23-35.

Verse 14

ἐπὶ πᾶσιν δὲ τούτοις τὴν ἀγάπην, ὃ ἐστὶν σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος.

σύνδεσμος, ου m that which binds together, bond

τελειότης, ητος f completeness; maturity

σύνδεσμος τῆς τ. bond which unites everything in complete harmony.

"Love is indeed like a 'fastening,' a σύνδεσμος, which holds them together in a single coherent package (cf. *1 Clement* 49:2: τον δεσμον της αγαπης του θεου). Nor is it accidental that σύνδεσμος was used already in 2:19 in the more technical sense of 'sinews, ligaments' of the body (see on 2:19). For the point is the same, that at the end of the day it is this love (and only this love) which is strong enough to hold together a congregation of disparate individuals." Dunn. Cf. Matt 5:43-48.

Verse 15

καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ βραβευέτω ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, εἰς ἣν καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι· καὶ εὐχάριστοι γίνεσθε.

εἰρήνη, ης f peace

Cf. Eph 2:2-3. "Here once more we should be ready to recognise something of a more titular force in the name 'Christ' ('the Christ'), since in prophetic perspective the peace promised to God's covenant people was a hope for the future new age (Isa 9:6-7; 54:10; Ezek 34:25-31; 37:26; Mic 5:4; Hag 2:9; Zech 8:12...).

The peace the Colossian believers could experience in their hearts was further proof that they belonged to the people of the Messiah in the age of the Messiah already come." Dunn

βραβευω act as judge or umpire, rule

"The metaphor is an attractive one: of the knowledge of what Christ has achieved and the inward calm tranquillity which believers can enjoy in consequence, determining what courses should be followed in difficult decisions and how the tensions of community relations (cf. 3:13) may be resolved (cf. Rom 14:17, 19; 1 Cor 14:33)." Dunn

εἰς, μια, ἐν gen ἑνος, μιας, ἑνος one
σῶμα, τος n body

"The one body is also the arena within which the peace of Christ comes to effect." Dunn

εὐχάριστος, ον thankful, grateful

Verse 16

ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖται ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ· διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ψαλμοῖς, ὕμνοις, ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς ἐν χάριτι, ᾄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ·

Instead of the unusual expression 'the word of Christ,' which nowhere else occurs in the NT, several witnesses substitute the more customary 'the word of God' or 'the word of the Lord.'

At the heart of corporate worship is the 'word of Christ' – the gospel in all its fullness centring in Christ, who is himself the source of all teaching and instruction.

ἐνοικεω live in

"In this context the ἐν ὑμῖν may also signify 'among you,' indicating an element of preaching/teaching in the communal gatherings of the Colossian Christians for worship and instruction." Dunn

πλουσίως adv richly, in full measure
σοφία, ας f wisdom, insight, intelligence
διδασκω teach

νοουθετω instruct, teach, warn

Cf. 1:28.

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον see v.13

"It is a striking feature of the Pauline corpus how much Paul insisted that the members of the churches to which he wrote should recognise their mutual responsibility to instruct and admonish (JB/NJB's 'advise' is too weak) each other (Rom 12:7; 15:14; 1 Cor 14:26; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:15; note also Gal 6:1-3)." Dunn

ψαλμος, ου m psalm, song

ὕμνος, ου m hymn

ᾠδη, ης f song, song of praise

πνευματικος, η, ον spiritual, pertaining to the spirit

"Their relation to the preceding clause is unclear ... but the possibility that such hymns were vehicles of instruction cannot be ruled out. Prior to the invention of printing, hymns and songs were a necessary and invaluable means of implanting Christian teaching – and even after (it is often said that Methodism's distinctive theology is to be found primarily in the hymns of Charles Wesley)." Dunn

χάριτι Noun, dat s χάρις, ιτος f grace,
gratitude

ᾄδω sing

Verse 17

καὶ πᾶν ὅ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ,
πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,
εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ δι' αὐτοῦ.

ἐὰν if, even if

Here equivalent to ἂν particle indicating contingency and introducing subjunctive. ὅ τι ἐὰν 'whatever'. "There is no discontinuity envisaged between worship and daily living; on the contrary, the whole of daily life should be lived out in the same spirit – 'your spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1-2). The attitude is thoroughly Jewish." Dunn

ὄνομα, τος n name

"Both here and in Eph 5:20 the thought is of those who have put themselves under the name of Jesus as Lord and who seek to do everything in consciousness of his commissioning and enabling. In this way an effective *inclusio* with the thematic of 2:6-7 is achieved: to walk in Christ Jesus as Lord is to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is what should mark out the Colossian Christians, in life as in worship, not a hankering for worship with often unnamed angels (2:18)." Dunn

εὐχαριστεῶ thank, give thanks

πατήρ, πατρός m father

"The very unusual collocation τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ, which is widely supported was emended by copyists who inserted καὶ, thus imitating Eph 5:20 and similar passages." Metzger