

“Being the People of God - 4”

Bulleen 24/7/2011
Colossians 3:1-17

This is the fourth Sunday in our focus on ‘Being the People of God’. In our reading, Paul is answering the question of what distinguishes the life of a follower of the Lord Jesus from those who live according to many of the world’s past and present philosophies, that ultimately have a focus on self.

Some of these philosophies today have mantras like: ‘just look after no.1’; ‘life is survival of the fittest’; ‘I have rights’; ‘If it feels good, do it’; ‘if you want it, take it’ and so the list goes on. My favourite however is; ‘you deserve it’.

In our reading, Paul even listed some of the outcomes of these kinds of philosophies: (vss.5&8) - *fornication, uncleanness, evil desire, idolatry, covetousness, disobedience, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying.*

Now, I am sure you will agree that all these things are still prevalent, and contribute to many of the problems, in our society today, and so the need for the life changing message of the Lord Jesus is just as vital in this generation as in past generations.

Is it any wonder that Paul commenced this section of his teaching with the words in vs.1 & 2:

“.. set your hearts on things above ..” and, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”

They seem such simple statements, and yet they can sometimes prove to be the hardest things to do. In the world today, our hearts and minds are constantly being barraged by visual signs to buy, buy, buy - to become slaves to consumerism.

To fuel this appetite for ‘stuff’, our shops are displaying more and more signs reading ‘Sale’ and ‘discounted’ than advertising the worth of the products. We are even being told that the survival of our economy is dependant upon the insatiable desire to want more - ‘because you deserve it’.

Our eyes and ears are also constantly being assailed by scenes and messages to accept the lowest moral and ethical denominator. And if we

want to hold to any moral principals or standards, we are told that we are impinging on the rights of others to live their lives as they want to live them, regardless of the consequences to others.

Is it any wonder that Paul urged us to set our minds on the things of God and to free ourselves from those things that only serve to distract and corrupt our minds and lives.

Not only this, but, in vss.5&8 Paul urges us to:

“Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: ..”; and *“.. rid yourselves of all such things ..”* This is a command to not only turn our faces away from the many forms of corruption and impurity in the world, but to actively eliminate and destroy them in our daily lives.

We hear everyday of the problems young people are facing with all kinds of drug and psychological addictions: smoking, binge drinking, marijuana, party drugs, heroin, gambling, pornography and even steroids: these are just a few of the obvious candidates. But can, or should, we just blame these, or are they merely a symptom of a wider community attitude that focus' on fulfilment and happiness to be found in artificial stimuli?

The apostle Paul is at pains to stress that **true success and fulfilment will only happen as we seek to live pure and holy lives**, not in our own strength, but through a practical and vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what it means to set your hearts on things above, on what God says will bring true fulfilment.

Consider **Matt.6:33**; ‘But seek first his Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you.’ - not the drugs and stimuli, but a sense of purpose, fulfilment, hope, peace and joy in all of life’s journey.

In vs.1 Paul declares that we can only set our hearts and minds on the things above because this is where we discover the Lord ‘seated at the right hand of God’, and in vs.3, because this is where our new life is ‘hidden with Christ Jesus’.

Of course, these are word pictures or images that declare the ultimate authority of the Lord to protect and secure us, **as we turn to Him**.

In vss.12&13 Paul then went on to describe some of the hallmarks of this new life we have in Jesus, as The People of God: *“.. as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with (ie. put on)*

*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
Bear with each other and forgive .. one another."*

This is quite a list. **As the People of God we are called upon not to focus on how the things of the world may effect us, but, more importantly, how they effect others.**

As such, compassion for those in difficult and needy situations; kindness toward those who are lacking in respect of others; humility as a witness against pride and arrogance; gentleness and patience toward those who would abuse and take advantage of others, now become hallmarks of our often **unvoiced witness for Jesus.**

These qualities of our new life in Jesus are not a sign of weakness and insipidness, but of strength and courage, especially in the face of all the problems, sin and evil that confronts us every day.

In vs.13 Paul then stresses, **twice**, the importance of the place of forgiveness in living as the People of God. Not only are we to be **forgiving and understanding** toward one another, within God's church, but also toward those who have not yet heard the invitation of Christ to become part of God's family.

Just to push home this vitally important part of the Christian life, Paul reminds us to: *"Forgive as the Lord forgave you."* **Always a good reminder.**

In the next verses, Paul then describes some of the elements of the new life we share in Christ Jesus.

".. Over all these virtues put on love .." (vs.14);
Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts .."
(vs.15); "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly .." (vs.16); and "..
Whatever you do (and say), do it ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus .."
(vs.17).

With these words, we are left in no shadow of a doubt that 'Being the People of God' means that, **in our connection with HIM**, we are to live lives that are quite different from so much of what we see and hear in the world today. There is a real dichotomy - living for God, or living for self. **We cannot do both!**

Our new life with the Lord is therefore exemplified by a witness of love that has nothing to do with what we want, with lust and self gratification,

but everything to do with a genuine thoughtfulness and practical caring for the well being of others.

In our new life in Jesus we also begin to experience a new peace that imparts a sense of wholeness, even in the face of various trials and difficulties.

Paul went on to write about this peace in Phil.4:7 when he wrote: “.. *And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding ..*”

Even for Paul, this peace is something that almost defies human description. As God’s people we just know this amazing peace when we need it.

Paul then wrote of the word of Christ that lives within us. As such, our lives are no longer without meaning, purpose and direction. They are not something we just make up as we go along.

As the People of God, we are united together because of what the Lord Jesus has spoken into our lives.

Our Lord’s words of love, forgiveness, acceptance and invitation continue to be heard, every time we read the scriptures, pray to Him, sing His praises and gather together as His people.

Finally Paul encourages us to do and say everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

This means that we no longer need to act on our own behalf, to simply please ourselves. We now live in the world today as His ambassadors, as His advocates and as His representatives.

When people look at us, really look at us, hopefully they will now get a glimpse of who God really is.

This is the challenge we face every day, to live as The People of God, and it all began when we learned to set our hearts and minds on the things above.

Living as the People of God has no restrictions based on education, life experiences, gender, age, health, or any other life factors. It is all about maintaining a vital relationship with the one true living God. Some have called it ‘Practicing the Presence of God’, and it is a practical holiness, because it is founded in a true spirituality that is centred on Jesus.

May you, today, be renewed and refreshed as you look up and focus

your lives on 'things above'.