**Colossians**

**Week 3 Col 2:16 – 3:17**

In the last section Paul talked about the dangers of false philosophies pointing both to Gnosticism and Judaism. He continues this theme in this section and begins by warning against those who claim that Christians must follow the food laws and festivals set out in the Torah. His argument is that these practices are just a foretaste, a preparation for the time that is to come and indeed is now here. Now the substance is Christ. Christ is the one to be worshipped, no other. Paul also warns against those who seek spiritual advancement through self-denial and visions.

To understand Paul’s thinking, we look at the verse 18. “*Do not let anyone disqualify you*”. The Greek here can be translated as *robbing of a prize*. This is particularly poignant when we remember Paul’s references to running the race in other letters. Here Paul is trying to say, the prize is already won, it is yours to lose. Thus, he warns against taking on all these human traditions which distract from the race in hand. When Paul refers to *holding fast to the head* this is seen as an indication that some false teaching may come from within the church.

For Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus is reflected in the process of baptism. He reminds his listeners that in baptism they have died with Christ, died to the ways of the world. So, he questions why they still hang onto the ways of the world by submitting to the food laws and the laws of uncleanliness that the Jews were insisting upon. Once again, he is warning against false piety by self-imposed disciplines and severe treatment of the body.

Rising out of the waters of baptism one rises with Christ and so Paul teaches of the followers of Christ should be seeking the things of above and not of this earth. The prize for this life is hidden and will only be revealed when Christ comes in glory, therefore the Christian should not be seeking the prize of being seen to be good but should have humility in all things. Note here that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. But in every other case God sits while everyone else stands. Christ is seated and sharing God’s sovereign rule.

Paul moves on to what life in Christ should be like. He begins by listing those behaviours that should now be rejected. There are two lists the first list of the sins of selfish desire in the second list of the sins of speech. Looking at these two lists we see that these outcomes are the result of a lack of love for others. Paul stresses the need to put on a new self and recognise that all are equal before God. Here we must note the difference in emphasis between the old life and the new. The old life, following rules and regulations and self-discipline was a personal attempt to become pious. The new life is one of community, note how it becomes plural, “*clothe yourselves*”. This new life, a life of love is a life of living together and sharing worship with God. The metaphor of clothing, taking it off and putting it on, points back to the decisive change brought by the cross and resurrection, repeated in baptism.

Paul refers to his listeners, as “*God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved*,” which Paul uses in preference to the Jewish idea of being the ‘elect’ of God. When Paul refers to the people as holy, he is not talking about morality but something that has already been accomplished, they have been set apart by God. In the old life the people had to follow rules and regulations, remain clean in order to become pious and acceptable to God. In the new life all are acceptable to God because of the actions of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is because we are accepted that we respond in love to God and to others. It is not in order to be accepted. Equally, Paul requires the church to be forgiving because we have already been forgiven by God.