

## Observations

1. The idea of being raised up with Christ, which is first introduced in 2:12, is continued in 3:1. Paul also develops this idea in Eph 2:1-10, and there are a number of striking parallels between the two passages.

| <b>Colossians 3</b>   | <b>Ephesians 2</b>   |
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| <p>Therefore, if you have been <b>raised up with Christ</b>, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (v. 1).</p>  | <p>...[God] <b>raised us up with [Christ]</b>, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus... (v. 6)</p>   |
| <p>Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to <b>immorality, impurity, passion evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry</b>. For it is because of these things that the <b>wrath of God</b> will come upon <b>the sons of disobedience</b>, and <b>in them you also once walked</b>, when you were living in them (vv. 5-7).</p> | <p>And you were <b>dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked</b> according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in <b>the sons of disobedience</b>. Among them <b>we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh</b>, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature <b>children of wrath</b>, even as the rest (vv. 1-3)</p> |
| <p>... [You] have put on <b>the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him</b>—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all (vv. 10-11).</p>                               | <p>For we are His workmanship, <b>created in Christ Jesus for good works</b>, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (v. 10).</p>   |

2. In the case of Eph 2, Paul contrasts the former estate of the believer (characterized by death in trespasses) with the effectuation of life through faith in Christ. By means of God’s gracious, saving activity, the former experience of death (bondage to sin and Satan) is overcome by the believer’s present experience of the resurrection of Christ. Col 3 approaches the believer’s estate from the opposite direction. In view of the present experience of the resurrection of Christ (v. 1—“Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ...”), believers ought to avoid a manner of living that is characterized by their former existence (vv. 5 and 8—“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality.... But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth....”).

Thus v. 1 represents an overarching ethic which flows from the resurrection of Christ and the believer's present experience of it:

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

3. Whereas Paul recounts the believer's passage from death to life in Eph 2, Col 3 equates the believer's new life in Christ with a kind of death. This is expressed in a chiasm in vv. 1-3:

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| <b>A</b><br>If you have been raised up with Christ (v. 1)...                            | <b>B</b><br>...then keep seeking the things above (v. 1).                                      |
| <b>A'</b><br>Because you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God (v. 3)... | <b>B'</b><br>...set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth (v. 2). |

4. This paradox has already been introduced in Col 2: 12, where Paul connects death with the believer's experience of Christ's resurrection:

[You were] buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God.

This event of sharing in both Christ's death and resurrection is apparently the background for what Paul describes in v. 11:

...in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ....

5. Col 2:11-12 appear to echo Rom 6:4, where Paul states that “we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” A circumcision has occurred—the “foreskin” of a life that was previously characterized by willful sinning has been cut away. That life of bondage and independence from God is forever gone; it is buried with Christ. Yet just as His death was surmounted by His resurrection, a new life that is “hidden with Christ in God” arises in the believer. So the ethic Paul enumerates in Col 3:1-2 derives its “oughtness” from the reality of what God has already accomplished in the life of every believer in Christ—this reality is expressed in two ways that are indissolubly linked: death to the old life, resurrection to the new.

6. Paul’s “resurrection ethic” of Col 3:1-2 is applied in several commandments in the verses that follow:

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| v. 9      | <b>Negative application</b><br>Do not lie to one another.   | <b>Rationale</b><br>since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices. |
| vv. 12-13 | <b>Positive application</b><br>Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another and forgiving each other.... | <b>Rationale</b><br>You are the chosen of God, holy and beloved.               |

Here the duality of Paul’s ethic (death to the old, resurrection to the new) can be seen. In v. 9 he urges the cessation of lying in light of the fact that it is characteristic of the old sinful life, the *old self*, which has died. In vv. 12-13, he urges the adoption and practice of Christ-like qualities such as compassion, kindness, forgiveness, etc. Such behavior embodies the new life of the believer. Thus the resurrection ethic is not merely about abstinence from sinful behavior, but it also embraces the resurrection life which proceeds from Christ and all its implications for daily living. The old self is set aside in favor of the resurrected life of the chosen of God.

7. While the “oughtness” of the resurrection ethic is derived from what is already accomplished by God at salvation, it also takes God’s future eschatological activity into account. Col 3:4 speaks of a future revelation of Christ, which is a reference to the *parousia* (cf. 1 Cor 1:7). At the *parousia*, when Christ is revealed, Christians will also be revealed with Him in glory. This future revelation is in contrast to the present reality of the believer, whose life<sup>1</sup> is currently “hidden with Christ in God” (v. 3)—that which is now hidden will be revealed at Christ’s return.

On the basis of the future disclosure of resurrected Christ with resurrected believer, Paul urges the following in v. 5:

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

In addition to the juxtaposition of what is hidden and what is revealed, there seems to be a juxtaposition of the “earthly body” and the “heavenly body” (which, although not mentioned directly, appears to be implied in the idea of the revelation of believers with Christ “in glory”). It is in light of both the “now” and the “not yet” (with respect

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<sup>1</sup> It appears that “life”, as Paul uses it here, is roughly parallel to the idea of resurrection, i.e., being raised up together with Christ.

to the believer's resurrection) that Paul calls his audience to holy living. It is as if believers are to appropriate the "not yet" (heavenly body) and apply it to the "now" by considering their "earthly" bodies to be dead to sin in all its forms.

## **Application**

The Christian life is a curious intersection of past, present, and future. We are not what we were before we encountered Christ, and yet we are not yet what we will be when He returns. Paul pulls these truths together in order to form an overarching Christian ethic: seek the things that are above. It is too narrow to define Christian morality merely in terms of taboos. Following this ethic means a departure from that which is sinful and earthly, and a pursuit of that which is pure and heavenly. Day by day, we must both depart from *and* pursue; we must live as though dead and yet alive. This paradox of Christian life will continue until the day when that which is hidden will be revealed with Christ in glory.