**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**COLOSSIANS-024**. **RISEN WITH CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. 5. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 6. For which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. 7. In the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them. 8. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10. And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: 11. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. 12. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."*

*Colossians 3:1-15*

The resurrection is regarded in Scripture in three aspects--as a fact establishing our Lord's Messiahship, as a prophecy of our rising from the dead, and as a symbol of the Christian life even now. The last is the aspect under which Paul deals with it here.

**I. Verses 1-4 set forth the wonderful but most real union of the believer with the risen Christ.**

We have said that the Lord's resurrection is regarded as a symbol, but that is an incomplete representation of the truth here taught, for Paul believed that the Christian is so joined to Jesus as that he has, not in symbol only, but in truth, risen with him. Mark the emphasis and depth of the expressions setting forth the believer's unity with his Lord: Ye were raised together with Christ; Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ. And these wonderful statements do not go to the bottom of the fact, for Paul goes beyond even them, and does not scruple to say that Christ is our life.

The ground of these great declarations is found in the fact that faith joins us in most real and close union to Jesus Christ, so that in His death we die to sin and the world, and that, even while we live the bodily life of men here, we have in us another life, derived from Jesus. Unless our Christianity has grasped that great truth, it has not risen to the height of New Testament teaching and Christian privilege. We cannot make too much of Christ our sacrifice, but some of us make too little of Christ our life, and thereby fail to understand in all its fulness that other truth on which they fasten so exclusively. Union with Christ in the possession of His life in us, and the consequent rooting of our lives in Him, is a truth which much of the evangelical Christianity of this day needs to see more clearly.

The life is hid, as being united with Jesus, and consequently withdrawn from the world, which neither comprehends nor sustains it. A Christian man is bound to manifest to the utmost of his power what is the motive and aim of his life; but the devout life is, like the divine life, a mystery, unrevealed after all revelation.

The practical conclusion from this blessed union with Jesus is that we are, as Christians, bound to be true in our conduct to the facts of our spiritual life, and to turn away from the world, which is now not our home, and set our mind (not only our affections) on things above. Surely the Christ, seated on the right hand of God, will be as a magnet to draw our conscious being upwards to Himself. Surely union with Him in His death will lead us to die to the world which is alien to us, and to live in aspiration, thought, desire, love, and obedience with Him in His calm abode, whence He rules and blesses the souls whom, through their faith, He has made to live the new life of heaven on earth.

**II. The first consequence of the risen life is negative, the death or putting off of the old nature, the life which belongs to and is ruled by earth.**

Verses 5-9 solemnly lay on the Christian the obligation to put this to death. The therefore in verse 5 teaches a great lesson, for it implies that the union with Jesus by faith must precede all self-denial which is true to the spirit of the Gospel. Asceticism of any sort which is not built on the evangelical foundation is thereby condemned, whether it is practised by Buddhist, or monk, or Protestant. First be partaker of the new life, and then put off the old man with his deeds. The withered fronds of last year are pushed off the fern by the new ones as they uncurl. That doctrine of life in Christ is set down as mystical; but it is mysticism of the wholesome sort, which is intensely practical, and comes down to the level of the lowest duties,--for observe what homely virtues are enjoined, and how the things prohibited are no fantastic classifications of vices, but the things which all the world owns to be ugly and wrong.

We cannot here enlarge on Paul's grim catalogue, but only point out that it is in two parts, the former (verses 5, 6) being principally sins of impurity and unregulated passion, to which is added covetousness, as the other great vice to which the old nature is exposed. Lust and greed between them are the occasions of most of the sins of men. Stop these fountains, and the streams of evil would shrink to very small trickles. These twin vices attract the lightning of God's wrath, which cometh on their perpetrators, not only in some final future judgment, but here and now. If we were not blind, we should see that thundercloud steadily drawing nearer, and ready to launch its terrors on impure and greedy men. They have set it in motion, and they are right in the path of the avalanche which they have loosened.

The possessors of the risen life are exhorted to put off these things, not only because of the coming wrath, but because continuance in them is inconsistent with their present standing and life (v. 7). They do not now live in them, but in the heavenly places with the risen Lord, therefore to walk in them is a contradiction. Our conduct should correspond to our real affinities, and the surface of our lives should be true to their depths and roots.

The second class of vices are those which mar our intercourse with our fellows,--the more passionate anger and wrath and the more cold-blooded and deadly malice, with the many sins of speech.

**III. In verse 9 Paul appends the great reason for all the preceding injunctions; namely, the fact, already enlarged on in verses 1-4, of the Christian's death and new life by union with Jesus.**

He need only have stated the one-half of the fact here, but he never can touch one member of the antithesis without catching fire, as it were, and so he goes on to dwell on the new life in Christ, and thus to prepare for the transition to the exhortation to put on its characteristic excellences. We note how true to fact, though apparently illogical, his representation is. He bases the command to put off the old man on the fact that Christians have put it off. They are to be what they are, to work out in daily acts what they did in its full ideal completeness when by faith they died to self and were made alive in and to Christ. A strong motive for a continuous Christian life is the recollection of the initial Christian act.

But Paul's fervent spirit blazes up as he thinks of that new nature which union with Jesus has brought, and he turns aside from his exhortations to gaze on that great sight. He condenses volumes into a sentence. That new man is not only new, but is perpetually being renewed with a renovation penetrating more and more deeply, and extending more and more widely, in the Christian's nature. It is continually advancing in knowledge, and tending towards perfect knowledge of Christ. It is being fashioned, by a better creation than that of Adam, into a more perfect likeness of God than our first father bore in his sinless freshness. The possession of it gathers all Christians into a unity in which all distinctions of nationality, religious privilege, culture, or social condition, are lost. Paul the Pharisee and the Colossian brethren, Onesimus the slave and Philemon his master, are one in Jesus. The new life is one in all its recipients, and makes them one. The phenomena of the lowest forms of life are almost repeated in the highest, and, just as in a coral reef the myriads of workers are not individuals so much as parts of one living whole, so also is Christ. The union is the closest possible without destruction of our individuality.

**IV. The final, positive consequence of the risen life follows in verses 12-15.**

Again the Apostle reminds Christians of what they are, as the great motive for putting on the new man. The contemplation of privileges may tend to proud isolation and neglect of duty to our fellows, but the true effect of knowing that we are God's elect, holy and beloved, is to soften our hearts, and to lead us to walk among men as mirrors and embodiments of God's mercy to us. The only virtues touched on here are the various manifestations of love, such as quick susceptibility to others sorrows; readiness to help by act as well as to pity in word; lowliness in estimating one's own claims, which will lead to bearing evils without resentment or recompensing the like; and patient forgiveness, after the pattern and measure of the forgiveness we have received. All these graces, which would make earth an Eden, and our hearts temples, and our lives calm, are outcomes of love, and must never be divorced from it. Paul uses a striking image to express this thought of their dependence on it. He likens them to the various articles of dress, and bids us hold them all in place with love as a girdle, which keeps together all the various graces that make up perfectness.

Thus living in love, we shall be free from the tumult of spirit which ever attends a selfish life; for nothing is more certain to stuff a man's pillow with thorns, and to wreck his tranquillity, than to live in hate and suspicion, or self-absorbed. The peace of Christ is ours in the measure in which we live the risen life and put on the new man, and that peace in our hearts will rule, that is, will sit there as umpire; for it will instinctively draw itself into itself, as it were, like the leaves of a sensitive plant, at the approach of evil, and, if we will give heed to its warnings, and have nothing to do with what disturbs it, we shall be saved from falling into many a sin. That peace gathers all the possessors of the new life into blessed harmony. It is peace with God, with ourselves, and with all our brethren; and the fact that all Christians are, by their common life, members of the one body, lays on them all the obligation to keep the unity in the bond of peace. And for all these great blessings, especially for that union with Jesus which gives us a share in his risen life, thankfulness should ever fill our hearts and make all our days and deeds the sacrifice of praise unto him continually.