

A Biblical Exegesis of Colossians 3:1-3 and its Significance for Christians in a
Postmodern-Post Christian Era

by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PAW', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul Andrew Weaver

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Abstract

This thesis is a Biblical Exegesis of Colossians 3:1-3 investigating its significance for Christians today. It explored: the historical, cultural and literary context of Colossians and the church in Colossae; in depth exegetical analysis to determine authorship and its original meaning, including preliminary analysis, contextual analysis, verbal analysis, literary analysis, an exegetical synthesis; and its significance for Christians today, including the practical implications of setting your hearts and minds on “...things above...” rather than on “...earthly things...” (Col3:1-3). Key ideas explored are: the believer’s position in Christ, the Colossians heresy, and the Christology of Colossians. In order to explore these topics and questions, the writer employed inductive Bible study principles primarily implementing the Theological Biblical Research Model of Smith and Woodbridge (2008). Multiple scholarly works in the form of commentaries, articles, dictionaries, Biblical encyclopaedias and lexica’s were consulted throughout in establishing the socio-political context from which the Colossian text emerged. Finally, the paper explored: What difference does this passage make for Christians today? Specifically, concerning the doctrinal significance of the Col 3:1-3 pericope for teaching us about God, ourselves and our relationship with God; and its practical significance for Christians today in applying the passage and the impact or change it should have on their lives. This paper is specifically concerned with the context of ‘Generation z’ and particular implications the pericope has for ministry to this generation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Title of Thesis

A Biblical Exegesis of Colossians 3:1-3 and its significance for Christians today.

1.2. Research Problem and Key Questions

Main research problem:

What is the significance of Colossians 3:1-3 for Christians today?

Key questions/sub-problems:

- What is the context of Colossians?
- What did Colossians 3:1-3 mean for its original readers?
- What significance does Colossians 3:1-3 have for Christians today?
- How do Christians today set their hearts and minds on “... things above ...” and not on “... earthly things ...” (Col 3:1-3¹)?

1.3. Preliminary Literature Review

The majority of scholars view Colossians 3:1-3 in a similar light to Hood (2009:7), who describes the pericope as one of the “... macro-exhortational sections of the letter, which are somewhat generic.... They sit above the doctrinal and specific exhortational sections, and unite the letter into a logical whole.”

Three major themes are evident in scholarly writings on the Book of Colossians that impact the Colossians 3:1-3 passage:

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the Bible translation used to quote Scripture in this thesis is the New International Version (NIV).

(a) The believer's position in Christ: Barram (2005:188) describes, the resurrection of Christ altered the reality of the cosmos and for believers. Colossians 3:1-17 "... roots behavioral change in the resurrected status of the letter's recipients.... The assumption here [Col 3:1] is that the believers "have," in fact, "been raised with Christ"."

Harvey (1992:336) agrees, Colossians describes the believer as having died with Christ and been "... made alive with him and has been raised with him to a newness of life." He adds the believer died and their life has been hidden 'with Christ' (Col 3:3) with the consequence being a new mindset, where the focus is "... on things above, not on earthly things" (Col 3:2).

Levison (1989:108) describes, to "... set your heart on things above ..." (Col 3:1) as an "... eschatological demand to concentrate on the hidden realities which will characterize them [believers] when they are glorified eternally in the world above." He (1989:97) adds, "No earthly realities, efforts, or techniques to attain that glory are effective; believers must seek the hope "which is stored up" for them (1:5), the glory which is as yet a hope (1:27) ..."

Moule (1973:481) argues believers live a life where they are "... yet to become what, as they claim, they already are", claiming this paradox can lead to frustration and an attempt to live life in their own efforts. He adds believers sharing in the death and life of Christ both frees them from the "... tyranny of mere ritual rules (2:20-23) and yet also enables them to be bound so firmly to Christ that they do not succumb to the moral evils of laxity and indiscipline against which those ritual rules were supposed to protect them" (1973:484).

(b) The Colossian Heresy (Col 2:8): Opposing the positional truth of the believer was various "... hollow and deceptive philosophy ..." (Col2:8). According to Bruce (1984:196 - 197) the only source of the heresy came from the Letter Paul wrote to the Colossians. "The context makes it clear that these prohibitions refer to things that are ethically neutral, not to things that are inherently sinful.... but what is deprecated here is a form of asceticism for asceticism's sake, cultivated as religious obligation."

Moo (2008:47) adds, Paul usually address false teaching directly and explicitly criticises the teachers. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul never directly addresses

the false teachers nor clearly describes the false teaching, giving the impression the false teaching arose from within the Church. Moo (2008:59) concludes the false teachers were probably Christians "... bragging about their ability to find ultimate spiritual "fulfilment" via their program of visions and asceticism."

House (1994:440) argues the heresy was a syncretistic Jewish mysticism that promoted circumcision, legalistic laws, food regulations, observing the Sabbath and new moon festivals. House (1994:442) continues, arguing the heresy of Colossians 2 "... echoes a form of Jewish mysticism known as Merkabah mysticism, which was characterized by supposed ascents of the initiates to heaven to converse with beings in the heavenly realm."

(c) The Christology of Colossians: According to Bruce (1984:291) the idea of Christ being the agent of reconciliation in the New Testament is a concept described by Paul specifically. House (1994:325) explains the source of salvation is the "... death of Christ on the cross, by which he has given an eternal inheritance to believers. As heirs, saints possess abundant salvific treasures, including redemption, reconciliation, sanctification, and ultimate glorification."

Bruce (1984:300) adds, the completion of Christ's victory is visible in the lives of Christians "... who are reconciled to God through Him and are now on the Lord's side in the conflict of the ages".... At present, their lives are hid with Christ in God, and when Christ their life is manifested, they will be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4.).

Schultz (2010:449) describes the hymn (Col 1:15-20) as "... extolling the supremacy of Christ in creation; all things in creation were created by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ." Moo (2008:61) adds the two major Christological themes appearing in Colossians are: Christ's supremacy over creation and his relationship to God. Moo continues, only Christ is able to bring all things in creation "... back under God's sovereignty and thereby provide believers with the resources that they need to live and flourish in a world dominated by hostile powers."

The preliminary literature review identified Col 3:1-3 as a transitional and unifying passage in the letter. As such, it is influenced by three recognised themes: the believer's position in Christ, the Colossians heresy, and the Christology of

Colossians. As a result, the author will conduct exegetical research concerning these themes within their historical, cultural, and literary context in order to draw conclusions for modern day Christians.

1.4. Research Methodology

The writer acknowledges there exist different meaningful ways to read and interpret the Bible. The writer further believes in order for the meaning of a text to be presented tried and tested exegetical norms are to be explored. In seeking an appropriate exegetical method the Inductive Bible Study approach was chosen. The inductive methodology from the writer's perspective prioritises the text and in a certain order considers all the relevant data to ascertain the meaning of the text" (Varughese 2004:122). Inductive Bible Study Principles follows sound hermeneutical principles. Smith (2008:169) echoes the view of Varughese stating, "Biblical exegesis is an in-depth, inductive examination of scripture in which the exegete systematically applies established hermeneutic tools (exegetical methods) to discover the meaning and implications of a text of a biblical text (or group of texts)."

Varughese (2004:123) rightly acknowledges that scholars follow different steps of exegesis in the inductive study method. While some will have three basic steps many others will have five to seven or even more steps. This thesis will primarily make use of the Theological Biblical Exegesis Research Model of Smith and Woodbridge (2008), Academic Writing and Theological Research Smith (2008) and A Practical Guide to Study God's Word (Smith 2009). Smith uses five broad steps with several sub-sections in his exegetical methodology using the inductive method. The five broad steps will be applied to form chapters two to five. Below is a brief outline of the mini-thesis.

The first chapter provided a framework for the study. This chapter included a brief statement of the problem; the objectives of the exegetical study; a literature review of the major scholarly perspectives on the text; the research methodology and structure of the thesis.

The second chapter focused on discovering the historical and literary context of the Letter to the Colossians. In order to fully understand the pericope studied, it was vital to understand the context in which it was written. In particular, we looked at the

general historical and cultural background of both the city of Colossae and the church, investigated the arguments for and against Paul being the author of the letter; looked at possible dates the letter was written and the audience it was written to; investigated the literary context; and finally surveyed the major theological themes of the letter.

The third chapter consisted of an in-depth exegetical analysis of the text in order to determine the authors intended meaning of Colossians 3:1-3 for the original recipients. In order to understand the meaning of the pericope for modern readers, we needed to first understand the meaning for the original audience.

The analysis included the following:

- (a) preliminary analysis: investigated the textual variants of the passage and looked at various translations of the passage;
- (b) contextual analysis: looked at the historical setting the author is addressing in the pericope and the literary context of the passage;
- (c) verbal analysis: investigated the lexical and grammatical meaning and significance of the key words of the pericope;
- (d) literary analysis: investigated the genre and structure of the pericope; and
- (e) an exegetical synthesis: looked at the question – what is the author communicating to the original audience?

Multiple scholarly works in the form of commentaries, articles, dictionaries, Biblical encyclopaedias and lexica's were consulted throughout chapters two and three in establishing the socio-political context from which the Colossian text emerged.

Chapter four spoke to the contemporary significance of the passage. It answered the question: What difference does this passage make for us today? The chapter explored two areas of significance: the doctrinal significance addressing what the pericope taught us about God, ourselves and our relationship with God; and the practical significance of Colossians 3:1-3 for Christians today, discussing how Christians should apply the passage and the impact or change it should have on their lives.

Chapter five concludes the thesis with a brief summary of the exegetical findings of Colossians 3:1-3 and closed with a discussion of their significance.

1.5. Conclusion

The introductory chapter addressed three main sections. The first section described the research problem investigated asking 'What is the significance of Colossians 3:1-3 for Christians today?' The second section investigated previous scholarly work addressing the Col 3:1-3 pericope. The final section laid out the various Research Methodologies utilised in thesis. The authors chosen approach is applicable to maintain the integrity of the text in exploring modern day implications. The intention of this thesis is to investigate the implications the pericope has in ministry to, and Christian growth in modern day believers.

Chapter 2

Context of the Letter to the Colossians

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the structure and process implemented in the thesis was described, referring to previous scholarly work addressing the Col 3:1-3 pericope and introducing the various Research Methodologies utilised. The ensuing chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section will discuss the background to Colossians focusing on authorship; where was it written; and when. The second section will address the historical context into which the letter to the church in Colossae was written. The third section will deal with the literary context focusing on structure, argument and flow of the letter. The final section will highlight the theological themes present in the letter.

2.2 Background of the Letter to the Colossians

The founder of the church in Colossae was believed to be Epaphras (Col 1:7-8). Scholarly views believed Paul never visited Colossae; rather Epaphras most likely travelled to Ephesus and was a convert during Paul's three year ministry in this location, described in Acts 19 (Moo 2008:27). Arnold (2008:2289-2291) states Epaphras would have returned to Colossae as a new believer and begun to share the good news of Christ, leading to the founding of the church in this city. He adds that the letter to the Colossians is written at a time when Epaphras has travelled to visit Paul, describing to him the threat of the false teaching within the church in Colossae. The letter is Paul's response encouraging the church toward Christian maturity.

2.2.1 Author

Pauline authorship of the Letter to Colossae has been questioned by scholars in recent times with various arguments presented suggesting a different author: either a disciple of Paul or someone well versed in Pauline literature.

2.2.1.1. Arguments against Pauline authorship

(a) Style and Language

Compared to authentic letters of Paul, Wilson (2005:13) explains Paul used at least 15 different words in Colossians that he never used in his other letters. However, each of these words appears elsewhere in the New Testament. The style of Colossians is argued by Wilson to be cumbersome and wordy, differing to Paul's usual writing style. Dunn (1996:36) adds a difference can also be seen in speech mannerisms and patterns of composition.

(b) Theological Differences

Thompson (2005:3) argued Colossians lacks in addressing justification or the law, role of the Holy Spirit, and the eschatological framework common in other Pauline works. Several other issues raised in this letter are dealt with in an uncharacteristic manner compared to how Paul dealt with the same issues in his other letters.

(i) The Christological teachings: Colossians extends beyond Paul's other letters in terms of his Christological teaching. In the first chapter alone the author wrote: "The Son is the image of the invisible God ..." (Col 1:15); "For in him all things were created ..." (Col 1:16); and "... through him to reconcile to himself all things ..." (Col 1:20). It was also argued this writing reflected late first-century belief and revealed a Gnostic influence (Moo 2008:33).

(ii) Paul's use of the picture of 'the body of Christ' was a manner contrary to its usage in the undisputed letters of Paul (Sumney 2008:3). In the undisputed letters, Paul used the picture to describe the local church, while in Colossians it was used to describe the universal church (Col 1:18).

(iii) The eschatology of Colossians: Thompson (2005:5) argued this was one of the most glaring theological differences to undisputed Pauline letters. Colossians focused on the Christians present possession of eschatological blessings. Moo

(2008:34) added, the view in Colossians contrasted that which God had done in Christ 'already' with the tension of what had 'not yet' occurred.

2.2.1.2. Counter arguments defending Pauline authorship

(a) Style and Language

Wilson (2005:13) counters that the subject matter, particularly in chapter two, allows for the large proportion of words not used elsewhere to not be extraordinary. In Colossians, Paul focuses his writing on issues raised by a certain style of false teaching, an issue not present in other Pauline books. Wallace (2004:2) adds, the use of an amanuensis would also increase the number of Greek words found in Colossians that are not present in other Pauline literature.

(b) Theological Differences

(i) The Christological teachings: O'Brien (1982:xliv) disagrees with this argument, stating that it is true Colossians contains more Christological teaching that is fuller and more systematic in presentation than Paul's authentic letters. However, this does not discount Paul was the author, especially in the face of countering the false teaching the church in Colossae was facing.

(ii) The 'Body of Christ': the distance between calling the local church the body of Christ to the universal church the body of Christ is not insurmountable, but rather logical progression. "The concept of Christ as an "inclusive figure," an idea rooted solidly in Old Testament and Jewish perspectives, provides a much more likely and quite adequate explanation for the development of this conception in Colossians ..." (Moo 2008:34).

(iii) The eschatology of Colossians: O'Brien (1982:5) counters this argument, pointing out verses such as Col 3:4 does refer to Christ's return, but at the same time verses such as Col 3:6 balance this focus by warning them to live a holy life because of the coming judgement. O'Brien (1982:6) adds, Paul's focus on eschatological blessings was again intended to counter the deceit of the false teaching. Paul was countering the argument of the false teachers, that believers did not have forgiveness and blessings yet, by declaring believers already possessed these gifts (Col 3:1-3).

2.2.2 Date and Location of Writing

Traditionally it's believed Paul wrote Colossians whilst imprisoned in Rome. However, arguments are presented suggesting Caesarea or Ephesus as possible locations (Wallace 2004:4). It's believed Paul wrote the Letter to the Colossians at the same time and from the same location as he wrote Ephesians and Philemon. Wilson (2005:20) states, taking into account Colossians indicates it was sent during the time of Paul's imprisonment (Col 4:3, 18), with the letter making no indication that he would be released soon, common thought is the letter was written between 60 and 61 AD.

2.3 Historical Context

Bruce (1984:3-5) describes Colossae as a city in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor, previously part of Phrygia Kingdom. It was located on the south bank of the Lycus River and neighbored Laodicea and Hierapolis. From 133 BC, the cities of the Lycus Valley were under the authority of the Roman proconsul of Asia after the last king of Pergamum died and bequeathed his kingdom to Rome. The population was primarily Gentile, but according to Bruce (1984:8-13) Jews had also settled in this area from as early as the third century B.C.

Moo (2008:27) as indicated above, states Paul most likely had never visited Colossae when he wrote his letter to the church, but rather the church in Colossae was probably founded by Epaphras (Col 1:7, 4:12). It is assumed Epaphras was a convert of Paul's during the three years he ministered in Ephesus. Epaphras travelled to Rome, where Paul was imprisoned, in order to procure Paul's help in addressing the issues that were facing the church in Colossae. The purpose of the letter Paul writes to the Church in Colossae is to counter the false teaching in which they were finding themselves entangled.

Moo (2008:27-28) views Paul's uses of terminology in Colossians better describes the salvation of Gentiles than Jews, indicating the church was largely Gentile (Col 1:12, 21, 27 & Col 3:5). Thompson (2005:7) believes, however the church was either strongly influenced by Jews or contained a Jewish Christian element who were advocating certain practices and ecstatic spiritual experiences, which required the

observation of various Jewish festivals, New Moon celebrations, Sabbaths (Col 2:16) and what can be interpreted as food and purity laws (Col 2:21).

The list in Col 2:16 of Jewish Festivals, New Moon Celebrations and Sabbaths mirrors similar lists in Ezek 45:17 and Hos 2:13, and as Barth and Blanke (1994:339) describes, refers to a summary of Jewish feasts celebrated in accordance to the instruction of the law.

2.4 Literary Context

The theme of Colossians was simply stated by Wallace as (2004:8) ‘the sufficiency of Christ’. Thompson (2005:11) takes it further, stating “Colossians underscores the supremacy and pre-eminence of Christ in that the one who died on the cross to reconcile all things is none other than the one through whom God created and sustains the world.” Keathley (2004:§8) agrees, describes it as the “... fruitful and effective power of the gospel message, a message that heralds the supremacy or pre-eminence, headship, and the sole sufficiency of Christ to the church, which is his body.”

Keathley (2004:§2) continues, the book presents Christ in the light of him as creator and sustainer. Christ is presented as the all-sufficiency, all-supremacy, fullness of who he is and his work as the creator and sustainer of the universe and the total answer to man’s need. Bruce (1984:26-27) adds, the teaching of Colossians focused on countering the Colossian heresy – addressing the “... uniqueness of the person of Christ, in whom the plenitude of deity was embodied; the perfection of the redeeming and reconciling work which he accomplished on the cross, and the spiritual liberty enjoyed by all who by faith were unified to him.”

The flow of thought of Colossians reveals much insight into the Col 3:1-3 passage we are studying. Wallace (2004:9) describes the body of the letter starts at 1:3 after Paul’s greetings to the Church in Colossae. Paul begins with outlining the sufficiency of Christ (1:3 – 2:7); he argues against the views of the heretics (2:3 – 3:4); and ends with a call to the church to live lives worthy of the sufficiency of Christ (3:5 – 4:6).

Wallace (2004:9) describes the first major section of Colossians (1:3 – 2:7) as thanksgiving for the faith of the believers, praying for an increase in knowledge and

productivity; and a focus on Christ as reconciler, reconciling the Colossian believers to Himself. The second section (2:8 – 3:4) addresses the crux of the issue: the effect of the Colossian heresy, the denying of the sufficiency of Christ, upon the believers. Paul begins by reaffirming Christ's sufficiency (2:8 – 15) and then addresses the effect the heresy has had upon the believers (2:16 – 3:4). Paul first addressed the heretical combination of Jewish legalism and mysticism that denied the sufficiency of Christ (2:16 – 19) and later focuses on believers return to human regulations and their lack of understanding of Christ's sufficiency.

The third section (3:5 – 4:6) described by Wallace (2004:9-10), is not disconnected to the previous sections in Colossians, but rather Paul describes Christ's sufficiency as not only for salvation, but also for sanctification. Paul highlights three areas where Christ's sufficiency motivates us: (1) in our personal lives (3:5-17); (2) to conduct oneself responsibly towards family (3:18 – 4:1); and (3) be concerned towards the needs of others (4:2-6).

2.5 Theological Themes

The major theological themes or motifs taught by Paul throughout the book of Colossians include (a) the nature of the False Teaching; (b) the Christology of Colossians; and (c) the eschatological motif.

2.5.1 Nature of the False Teaching

Though the purpose of Colossians isn't directly stated in the letter, it is clear from the numerous mentions that the theme of false or heretical teaching is a major focus. O'Brien (1982:31) explains, nowhere in the letter to the Colossians does Paul clearly describe the nature of the false teaching. The major facets of the false teaching must be pieced together through studying the letter.

Moo (2008:47-48) explains, Paul warns against the false teaching in a general manner, referring to 'no one' (2:4) or 'anyone' (2:8). There is no indication in the letter as to what the believers in Colossae were dealing with, nor did the teaching come from outside the community of believers. Paul's admonitions regarding being 'taken captive' (2:8) or 'disqualified' (2:18) indicate the false teaching was attractive to the believers.

It is assumed the Colossian believers knew what the false teaching was Paul was addressing. The clearest statements describing the false teaching are in Col 2:8-23:

(1) "... philosophy ..." (2:8): the term is only used in this passage in the New Testament. It describes a range of belief systems, tendencies and viewpoints within both Greek and Jewish environment (O'Brien 1982:109).

(2) "... depends on human tradition ..." (2:8) is viewed as similar to Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees in the New Testament, indicating the false teaching could be Jewish. Thompson (2005:54) sees a link between the phrases 'philosophy', 'human tradition', and 'worldly ordinances' seeing them each as different methods Paul uses in reference to the false teaching.

Bruce (1984:18) adds, that 'human tradition' come from "...elemental spiritual forces of this world ..." (2:8), something the Colossian believers once were subject to, but through salvation are no longer bound (Col 2:20). To resubmit to these elements would reintroduce the believers to a state of bondage again.

(3) Paul concludes verse 8 clearly describing the false teaching as something not dependent on Christ. O'Brien (1982:111) elaborates, explaining the use of the word 'deity' in verse 9 describes "... what dwells in Christ is in its entire fullness ..." and is distinguished against the 'philosophy' based on the 'elementary principles of the world' (2:8).

(4) The false teaching encouraged the adherence to certain holy days and the abstinence of certain food and drink (2:16). Bruce (1984:18) argues the "... prohibitions imply a degree of asceticism not usually associated with Jewish tradition. They refer to things that are ethically neutral, not to things that are sinful in themselves."

(5) The "...worship of angels ..." (2:18) is a major focus of the false teaching. Moo (2008:51) describes this as a much debated phrase that may refer to "... some kind of worship, or veneration, offered to angels by humans; or to the participation of humans in the worship of angels."

(6) "...what they have seen ..." (2:18). Moule (1980:104-105) explains there are three possible meanings: a term taken from other religions and refers to entering the

sanctuary after initiation; vision is considered as 'most prized territory' and could be a metaphor taken from the Jews entering the Promised Land; or 'investigating'. Moule explains the final possibility could refer to the false teachers not holding on to the truth, but rather constantly investigating truth.

(7) "They have lost connection with the head ..." (2:19) Dunn (1996:185) suggests the false teachers are either Jewish believers who've attempted to combine Christianity with Jewish mysticism or a Jew was advocating entering the presence of God through an alternative manner than through Christ.

(8) The false teachers advocated living according to a set of rules in order to grow spiritually (2:20-23).

Moo (2008:52) adds the assumption that the false teachers questioned the supremacy or sufficiency of Christ due to the vast references of Paul to Christ throughout the letter.

The major option for the false teaching:

(1) Gnosticism: Bruce (1984:20-22), referring to the definition of Gershom Scholem, explains Gnosticism as a "... religious movement that proclaimed a mystical esotericism for the elect based on illumination and the acquisition of a higher knowledge of things heavenly and divine ..." Bruce explains the heresy could potentially be classified as an 'incipient Gnosticism' or a form of Gnosticism that made room for Christian elements.

(2) Jewish Mysticism: this belief is rooted in the phrase "... worship of angels ..." (Col 2:18). The Greek phrase is unclear as it could either mean 'worship of angels' or 'worship engaged in by angels'. Moo (2008:54) explains Jewish apocalyptic writings often describe visions of the seer in heaven invited to worship God along with the angels.

House (1994:440), who describes the heresy as a syncretistic Jewish mysticism, explains it promoted "... legal ordinances, circumcision, food regulations, the Sabbath, new moon, and other prescriptions of the Jewish calendar." Moo (2008:54) adds, further evidence that this is what Paul was referring to comes from the phrases 'false humility' and 'go into detail about what they have seen' (2:18). False humility

was a term used to refer to fasting; a practice used by seers to induce visions; and the second phrase seems to intend to have reference to visionary experiences. Paul's focus on the sufficiency of Christ is an expected response to Jewish mysticism as believers don't need to add mystical experiences into worship in order to relate to God.

Bruce (1984:23-24) elaborates the Jewish mysticism could have involved a form of merkabah mysticism. This form of mysticism required the precise observance of the law, particularly the law of purification, aimed to bring a follower into "... the vision of the heavenly chariot (*merkābāh*), with God visibly enthroned above it ...". On top of this, a period of asceticism was required. The attempt of ascent into the visions necessitated the help of angels and therefore all was done not to incur their hostility.

Bruce (1984:24) continues by pointing out it could be claimed Paul too had an experience of this kind with his 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:2-9) as his memento guarding him against spiritual pride. Paul describes the false teachers in Colossae as people who boasted with "... false humility.... Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind" (2:18).

(3) Judaism: O'Brien (1982:32) argues the 'philosophy' (2:8) taught was simply Judaism practiced and taught by the Jews. The passages in Colossian used to argue for Jewish Mysticism as the false teaching, can be adequately explained in terms of standard Jewish teaching.

(4) According to Moo (2008:57-58), the majority of scholars believe the false teaching is syncretistic – a mix of religious and philosophical views. Various combinations have been proposed, the most viable being a combination of Pgyptian folk belief, local folk Judaism and Christianity. This view was proposed by Clinton Arnold.

It's difficult to draw a conclusive picture of what the false teaching concerns, but it can be seen that the false teachers probably came from within the community of believers in Colossae; they bragged about their ability to find spiritual fulfilment via visions and asceticism and were focused on spiritual beings. The beliefs of the false teachers cumulated in questioning the sufficiency of Christ.

2.5.2 Christology of Colossians

As stated earlier, the key theme of the Book of Colossians is the supremacy of Christ. From the beginning of the letter Paul clearly describes Christ's relationship to God (Col 1:15-20). Moo (2008:61) describes the focus of Paul's argument in the letter is found in the combination of the two themes of: "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God ..." (Col 1:15) and he is "... the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15). Jesus' relationship with God means he is the only one able to bring all of creation back into relationship with God.

Thompson (2005:111) explains one of Paul's purposes of this theme was to relate Jesus to God and highlight the identity of both: "...Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." (1:3), "...his beloved Son ..." (1:13), "...God's mystery ..." (2:2), "...Christ ... seated at the right hand of God ..." (3:1) and "...hidden with Christ in God" (3:3).

A further purpose of Paul, described by Thompson (2005:112) was to highlight the human predicament and reveal God's solution – Christ, who is sufficient for believers: Christ has "... rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son ..." (1:13), Christ has "...reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach ..." (1:22), and the believer has been "... raised up with Christ ... hidden with Christ in God.... you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (3:1-4).

Keathley (2004:§1-13) describes Paul's extensive writing on the supremacy of Christ is in direct response to the false teaching the church in Colossae was battling with. Col 1:15-18, according to Keathley, highlights several characteristics of Christ:

(1) The image of the invisible God (1:15): Paul describes Christ as the exact image of God. As Keathley (2004:§2) explains, the Greek word for 'image' is '*eikōn*' communicating the ideas of representation and manifestation. Paul was stressing to the believers that Jesus is not only a representation of God, but he is the perfect manifestation of God.

(2) The Firstborn over all creation (1:15): Keathley (2004:§3) explains the idea of Christ being firstborn has led to describing Jesus as the first thing created, but this is a wrong concept. The Greek word for firstborn, '*prōtotokos*', describes not only the

concept of first in time, but also first in priority. Paul is describing Christ as not only preceding all creation, but also as sovereign over all creation.

(3) Through Christ, all things were created (1:16): Paul continues to describe Christ's sovereignty by describing that all things were created by Him. The effect of placing the phrase 'all things' both at the beginning and end of the verse describes the all encompassing scope of Christ involvement in creation and authority over creation (Keathley 2004:§5).

(4) The Sustainer of all things (1:17): Keathley (2004:§7) explains Paul uses the Greek word '*sunistēmi*' to describe Christ as the sustainer – the one who brings together, holds, unites and maintains the existence – of all things. Christ is the power that maintains creation's existence.

(5) The Head of the new creation, the church (1:18): According to Keathley (2004:§10) Paul moves from describing Christ as sovereign over all creation, to declaring Christ as head of the church. Paul uses the Greek word '*kephalē*' for head, declaring Christ has authority, supremacy and control over the church.

(6) The Firstborn from among the dead (1:18): Keathley (2004:§11) describes Paul's uses of the word 'firstborn' relates back to its use in verse 15, but this time most likely is referring to first in time, rather than in priority. Paul was declaring Christ as head over the church because he is the first to have defeated death through resurrection and is therefore the beginning of a new creation.

(7) The Preeminent One of all things (1:18): Keathley (2004:§12) explains, Paul describes in verse 16 Christ created and sustains all things in the old creation. As the firstborn among the dead – the first to defeat death, Christ has also become the creator and sustainer of the new creation, and therefore the preeminent one of all things.

Shultz (2010:449) explores a further aspect of the supremacy of Christ described by Paul in Col 1:19-20 by looking at the reconciliatory work Christ performed bringing mankind into a salvation relationship with God. Schultz, agreeing with Keathley, explains Christ is supreme over all things because all the fullness – his divine

essence and glory – of God dwells in Christ (1:19) and all things have been reconciled by God to Himself through Christ’s atoning work on the cross.

Understanding the fullness of the reconciliatory work of Christ requires an understanding of the phrase ‘all things’. Schultz (2010:450) explains this exact phrase is used five times in this passage and each time previously it’s interpreted as meaning ‘the entire created universe’. It is very likely that the phrase in verse 20 would also be interpreted to mean the same thing. Just like Christ has created all things, so too, he has provided reconciliation for all things. However, even though it’s clear all things are reconciled to Christ, Schultz explains the passage doesn’t speak of universal reconciliation – verses 12-14 make it clear the Father qualifies believers only through Christ.

2.5.3 The Eschatological Motif

Sumney (2008:17) explains Colossians “... emphasizes believers’ present possession of eschatological blessings.” Paul describes the believer as already been raised with Christ (2:12-13, 3:1) and already been made full (2:10). Paul, in his undisputed letters, does use language indicating believers have received a new life in Christ, but he doesn’t describe the believer’s resurrection as clearly as he does in Colossians. Sumney (2008:27) continues “... however, Colossians, too, looks forward to a future eschatological act to manifest God’s will for the world (3:1-4, 25).” O’Brien (1982:46) adds Col 3:4 contains the only unambiguous futuristic reference.

Sumney (2008:18) summarises, stating Colossians does have a significant future element in its eschatology. Christ is seen as victor over all powers, even if this victory isn’t evident in present life. Colossians recognises the tension between the declarations made regarding Christ and the believers place in Him, and the reality of the life the believer lives out.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the context of the letter to the Colossians, covering four main sections: the background to the letter including author, date and location the letter was written; the historical context of the letter; the literary context; and the major

theological themes found in the letter, which include the nature of the false teaching, the Christology of Colossians and the eschatological motif of the letter.

Chapter three provides an exegesis of Colossians 3:1-3. It serves as an in-depth analysis of the text and includes preliminary analysis, contextual analysis, verbal analysis, literary analysis and exegetical synthesis.

Chapter 3

Exegesis of Colossians 3:1-3

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter researched the context of the letter to the Colossians through investigating the: cultural context; the historical context; the literary context; and the theological themes. The ensuing chapter covers five broad sections. The first section will look at preliminary analysis of the text, discussing textual variants of the passage and the significant alternative renderings in translation of the pericope. The second section will address contextual analysis, discussing the underlying historical situation the author was addressing in the passage and the immediate context of the pericope. The third section deals with verbal analysis, analysing key words and phrases and grammatical features of the text. The fourth section focuses on literary analysis, highlighting the literary features of the passage. The final section and crux of this chapter addresses exegetical synthesis, which pulls together the analysis and discusses what the author is attempting to communicate to his original readers.

3.2 Preliminary Analysis

3.2.1 Textual Criticism

Each translation of Colossians 3:1-3 uses a different theory of how to translate the passage. Tate (2006:112, 381) points out there are three major categories:

(1) Literal translation where the syntax, idioms and grammar of the target language is ignored. Both the American Standard Version (ASV) and the New King James Version (MKJV) are examples of this translation form.

(2) Free translations where the sense and spirit of the source language is transferred to the target language, but there is much alteration of syntax, idioms and grammar. The Message is an example of this form of translation.

(3) Dynamic equivalent in which the translator is not concerned with translating word for word, but rather the sense and spirit or flavour of the source language is attempted to be reflected in target language. The New International Version (NIV) is an example of this form of translation.

A further form of translation referred to by Tate (2006:236-237) is Verbal Equivalence where the translators intention is to follow the meaning and word order of the original language. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) uses this form of translation.

I chose to use the NIV translation because of the dynamic equivalent form of translation. In most translations, Colossians 3:2-3 is translated very consistently; however there are slight differences in translation with verse one. Each translation maintains the same meaning, however I believe the NIV places a stronger emphasis and weight on how it translates the verse, which is closer to the true meaning I believe Paul intended.

The biggest difference between the NIV and most major translations lies in the dynamic equivalent translation of the word 'heart'. The NIV translates 'ζητετε' as "... set your hearts ..." (Col 3:1), however most translations interpret it more literally as 'seek', as evidenced by the NASB, ASV and MKJV. Garland (1998:201) describes in The NIV Application Commentary, "The new life gets under way with a new orientation as Christians set their hearts on (lit., "seek") the things above."

3.2.2 Translation

Various Bible translations have chosen to translate the passage differently. Below is listed the New International Version (NIV), Modern King James Version (MKJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the American Standard Version (ASV) with key phrases highlighted showing the differences in translation.

Bible	Verse	Translations
NIV	1	Since , then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God
MKJV		If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.
NASB		Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
ASV		If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God.
NIV	2	Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things
MKJV		Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth
NASB		Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.
ASV		Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth.
NIV	3	For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God
MKJV		For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God
NASB		For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
ASV		For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

My preferred translation of Colossians 3:1-3 is the NIV:

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Most of the main recognised translations of the Col 3:1-3 passage translate the verses quite consistently. The major alternative renderings are found in verse 1. According to Barth & Blanke (1994:392) the beginning phrase, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ ...” is a conditional clause assuming the reality that believers

have been raised with Christ as factual and therefore, better expressed if the conjunction 'εἰ' is translated as 'since' as with the NIV.

"...above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). Wilson (2005:236) argues 'seated' (καθήμενος) could be interpreted with the preceding 'God' (θεου), as creating a periphrastic tense however the majority of scholars separate the two words by inserting a comma. The addition of the comma turns a statement of position 'Christ seated at the right hand of God' as translated by MKJV, into a two separate statements 'Christ in heaven' and 'Christ seated at God's right hand', expressing strength, power and protection of God as translated by NIV, NASB and ASV.

As stated above, the NIV translates 'seek' (ζητεῖτε) as "... set your hearts ..." (Col 3:1), which differs to most translations that interpret it more literally as 'seek'. Harris (1995:137) defines 'seek' (ζητεῖτε) as 'aim at; keep seeking; or aspire to', implying Paul's intention was for the Believers to continuously seek 'things above'.

3.3 Contextual Analysis

3.3.1 Historical Setting

Within the Col 3:1-3 texts there are historical and cultural allusions pointing towards the historical occasion of the Colossian Heresy or the false teaching Paul is addressing.

Dunn (1996:199) describes Paul's main argument throughout Colossians is a response to what he regarded as a serious threat to the Colossian believers: the Colossian Heresy. False teachers were encouraging the inclusion of various rituals and observances in their belief, the result of which reduced the believer's grasp of the significance of Christ's death and resurrection and their dependence on Christ as their sufficiency. O'Brien (1982:159) adds that even though Paul doesn't directly refer to the false teaching in the Col 3:1-3 passage, it is clear Paul still has the heresy in mind.

Arnold (1996:274) agrees, pointing out Paul exhorts the believers in Colossae in Col 2 not to seek human wisdom and he continues in chapter three encouraging the

believers to invest their time and strength to seek true wisdom where it can be found – in Christ. Arnold explains Paul’s wording in Col3:1-3 was chosen to encourage the believers to “... grasp Christ ... not the tenets of “the [hollow and deceptive (Col 2:8)] philosophy”.”

Barth and Blanke (1994:391) however, believe this section goes beyond the scope of false teaching and rather view it as significant summaries of the previous two chapters. Barth and Blanke (1994:392) list the summarised points as: “... the significance of the Messiah for the addressees of the epistle (2:11-13/1a-3a); the dominion of the Messiah as creator over all creation (1:15-20/1b-2); the certain preservation of hope (1:5/3b+4) ...”

Wilson (2005:234-235) suggests the belief the letter to the Colossians exhorts against false teaching is difficult to adequately discern throughout the letter. Wilson suggests an alternative explanation to the historical background to this passage can be seen by interpreting this passage through asking the questions “... what were the concerns, the anxieties, of the local community: what problems did they [Colossian believers] face, and what answers does our author seek to give them?” The answers to these questions found in Col 3:1-3 suggest the letter was written to address the issue of an inadequate understanding of the significance of the work of Christ: an understanding of his supremacy and grasping the significance of his death and resurrection. The author was addressing the question of whether the work of Christ was sufficient to deliver the believer from cosmic powers, fate and the dangers of the afterlife.

3.3.2 Literary Context

The immediate literary context of Col 3:1-3 is summarised by the NIV as “Rules for Holy Living” whilst the NASB describes the section as “Put on the New Self”. Within the context of the book it can be described as a transition passage between the doctrinal and practical sections of the letter.

Dunn (1996:199) views the opening phrase of the passage, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ ...” (Col 3:1) links it to the rest of chapter 3 and the subsequent chapters in the letter. He describes the passage as a transition passage,

changing the focus of the letter from doctrinal statements to the practical outworking of these beliefs in the believers life.

Wilson (2005:234) has a similar view, but argues the passage is rather a summary of the previous chapters, recounting the Lordship of Christ and warning against false teaching, preparing the reader for the subsequent chapters. Finally, Barth and Blanke (1994:391) consider Col 3:1-3 as a continuation of chapter 2 and confrontation of the false teachings.

In describing the canonical context of Colossians, Exell (1959:8) explains each epistle of Paul has its one significant premise, with Colossians being "... the dignity and sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the Mediator and Head of all creation and of the church." Paul's main focus in the letter to the Colossians is the refutation of error and the person of Christ being a prominent aspect.

Polhill (1999:329) describes, Colossians appears to have been written at the same time as Ephesians and Philemon evidenced through internal links between the three letters. In particular, Ephesians and Colossians share a strong link as one-third of the contents of Colossians is duplicated in Ephesians.

3.4 Verbal Analysis

Paul's choice of wording in Colossians 1:1-3 was intentional. Understanding the significance of this passage requires analysing the meaning of key words and phrases (Lexical Analysis) and grammatical features in the passage (Grammatical Analysis).

3.4.1 Lexical Analysis

Harris (1995:137) explains verse 1 begins with 'if' ($\epsilon\iota$), which introduces a fact that is assumed as true – what follows is the truth rather than something that is a possibility. It introduces a fact as: 'if, as it is true' or 'since'.

'Since' ($\omicron\nu\nu$): combined with 'if' ($\epsilon\iota$), O'Brien (1982:159) explains, the phrase is the positive form of and corresponds to the same phrase in Col 2:20 "Since you died with Christ ...". The word ' $\omicron\nu\nu$ ' can be translated as 'since' or 'therefore'.

'Raised' (*συνηγερθητε*): is described by Harris (1995:137) as a constative aorist signifying a single past event or action. In this context it is referring to the believer's resurrection and new life in Christ. Thayer (2002:s.v.4891) interprets the word as 'to raise up together'. O'Brien (1982:159) adds Paul's use of the aorist tense indicates he isn't promoting perfectionism, but describing the believer's inclusion in this baptism as a past event – the links with 'earthly order' have been destroyed and new links with 'heavenly order' have been established.

'Seek the things above' (*τα ανω ζητειτε*): Harris (1995:137) explains 'seek' (*ζητειτε*) is a plural present active imperative of '*ζητέω*' and is defined as 'aim at; keep seeking; or aspire to'. Combined with a neuter article, adverbs like 'above' (*ανω*), which describe time and place, may become substantive. In this situation, the phrase refers to 'the things or realm above' or 'heaven'. Barth and Blanke (1994:393) describe 'seek' (*ζητειτε*) as the idea that life has "...inherently determining and imprinted concerns which are usually represented as concerns about the elementary necessities such as nourishment and clothing, but after the sacrifice of Jesus these concerns are to be oriented toward the "kingdom of God"."

'To be' (*εστιν*): is described by Thayer (2002:s.v.1510) as "... the first person singular present indicative ..." verb and is translated as 'to be' or 'to exist'. Combined with the adjective 'seated' (*καθήμενος*), it's translated as 'is seated'. Harris (1995:137) adds, in a similar manner that Christ's resurrection is assumed as fact earlier in verse 1, so Christ's ascension into heaven is assumed as fact here.

'By the right side' (*εν δεξια*): Harris (1995:137) explains the phrase is translated as 'at the right hand side'.

'Set your mind on things above' (*τα ανω φρονηετε*): Thayer (2002:s.v.5426) describes 'to think' (*φρονηετε*) in verse two as a verb which can be translated as 'to understand; be wise; to think; or to seek'. Dunn (1996:205) adds, the verb doesn't only refer to thinking about an issue, but rather having a 'settled understanding or opinion' on an issue. Combined with the adverb 'above' (*ανω*) which means 'upward; above; or top', the phrase can be translated as 'setting your mind on heaven'. Harris (1995:138) adds 'to think' (*φρονηετε*) emphasises an inner attitude, rather than a practical action, required for the focussing of your mind on heaven.

Barth and Blanke (1994:395) highlight the verb 'seek' (*ζητεῖτε*) in verse one is replaced with 'mind' (*φρονέω*) in verse 2. Despite the fact 'seek' (*ζητεῖτε*) refers to the will, or as Harris (1991:138) describes, inner attitude required to obtain these spiritual goals, while 'mind' (*φρονέω*) refers to the intellect or the practical pursuits of these goals, Barth and Blanke believe there is no reason to interpret the two words differently.

'Not on things on the earth' (*μη τα επι της γης*): the phrase 'on the earth' (*επι της γης*) is described by Harris (1995:138) as translated as 'the things of the earth'; or 'earthly matters'. Thayer (2002:s.v.3361) explains 'not' (*μη*) is a "... primary participle of qualified negation" and is translated as 'no; none; or not least'. Harris (1995:138) explains 'not' (*μη*) negates the phrase 'on earthly things' and contrasts heaven and earth, with heaven representing 'spiritual matters' and earth representing 'unspiritual matters'. O'Brien (1982:160-161) adds the contrast Paul presented counters the view of earth as evil and mankind's need to focus solely on legalistic, external observances to enter the spiritual realm or heaven. Paul presented an ethical contrast viewing the earth "... as a special theatre of sin ..." and heaven as the focus on the "... exclusiveness and completeness of Christ ..."

'For you are dead' (*απεθανετε γαρ*): the third verse, Dunn (1996:206) explains, begins by restating the importance of understanding the new perspective and the consequence of identification with Christ. Wilson (2005:238) explains 'for' (*γαρ*) indicates this verse is explanatory of what has been said previously. Harris (1995:138) elaborates explaining that since the same phrase is also used in 2:20, 'for' (*γαρ*) can also be viewed as 'I repeat'. Thayer describes 'dead' (*απεθανετε*) as a verb that is translated as 'to die'. Wilson (2005:238) adds, 'dead' (*απεθανετε*) too refers back to the previous chapters, particularly the explanation of believers having died and been resurrected with Christ (2:12, 2:20).

'And your life is hid' (*και η ζωη υμων κεκρυπται*): Harris explains 'and' (*και*) describes the result of what was written previously and can be viewed as 'consequently'. Thayer describes 'hide' (*κεκρυπται*) as a primary verb defined as 'to hide; or conceal' and as Harris (1995:139) adds, hints towards the eternal result of resurrection with Christ. O'Brien (1982:165) describes the verb 'hide' (*κεκρυπται*) translated as 'hidden'

is a perfect tense, which contrasts with ‘you died’ and “... stresses the ongoing and permanent effects: your life has been hidden with Christ in God and it remains that way”. Wilson (2005:239) explains ‘life’ (*ζωη*) might refer to physical life, but throughout the New Testament, the predominate use is that of “... supernatural life belonging to God and Christ, which believers will receive in the future, but they also enjoy here and now”.

The phrase ‘with Christ’ is not included in the phrase ‘For you died’ (3:3), but is strongly implied in order to make the point that Paul was not referring to physical death. As Harris (1991:138) adds, ‘for you are dead’ (*απεθανετε γαρ*) is the same verbal form as Col 2:20 and therefore is assumed to refer to ‘dying with Christ’. ‘For’ (*γαρ*) can be seen as ‘I repeat, you died’, but Harris believes it is more probable it is translated as ‘for’ and “... introducing the grounds of the twofold injunction of v.2: believers are to fix their thoughts on the realm above because their resurrection lives are hidden with Christ in heaven ...”

‘With Christ in God’ (*συν τω χριστω εν τω θεω*): Harris (1995:139) describes ‘with Christ’ (*συν χριστω*) doesn’t simply mean “... “along with [the life of] Christ.” Rather, *συν* shows that the resurrection lives of believers are intimately connected ... with the risen, heavenly life of Christ.” The phrase also expresses that believers already live with Christ in heavenly realms, in a spiritual sense.

3.4.2 Grammatical Analysis

Chapter 3 marks a transition in Colossians. Paul moves from extolling the dangers of the heresy the church faces and encouraging turning their back on this way of life to clearly laying out how a Christian is expected to live. Verses 1-3 are viewed as a transitional passage between the didactic section (theology) and the paraenetic section (practical).

Verse 1: “Since you have been raised ...”: Rogers and Rogers (1998:466) describe ‘raised’ (*συννηγερθητε*) as (1) passive: indicating the verb or action is done to the object and not active where the object is doing the action ‘to be co-resurrected’; (2) Indicative: used in a conditional clause, which presumes the actuality and truth of the

verb 'since you've been'; and (3) Aorist: looks at the completed action 'since you have already been raised'.

"... things above ...": Thayer (2002:s.v.507) describes 'above' (*ανω*) as an adverb and defines it as 'up, above, in a higher place, heaven, high'.

"... set your hearts ...": 'seek' (*ζητειτε*) is described by Rogers and Rogers (1998:466) as a present imperative action implying a constant, repetitive and habitual action.

"... seated at the right hand ...": Thayer (2002:s.v.2521) describes 'seated' (*καθημενος*) as a verb and is defined as 'to sit, be seated'

Verse 2: "Set your minds ...": Rogers and Rogers (1998:466) describe 'to think' (*φρονειτε*) as a present, imperative, action and is defined as 'to think, to be minded'. Rogers and Rogers distinguish between this verb and the verb used in the previous verse as this verse focuses on an inner attitude, whereas the previous verb focused on a practical pursuit.

"... earthly things ...": Thayer (2002:s.v.1093) explains 'earth' (*γης*) is a noun referring simply to 'arable land, ground, earth'.

Verse 3: "For you died ...": Vine (1969:310) describes 'dead' (*απεθανετε*) as to die to all "... spiritual association with the world and with that which pertained to their unregenerate state ..."

"... and your life is now hidden ...": Vine (1969:558) defines 'hide' (*κεκρυπται*) as 'to cover, conceal, keep secret'. Rogers and Rogers (1998:466) define it simply as 'to hide'. They explain the concept of a believer's life hidden 'with Christ in God' (Col 3:3) points to three ideas: secrecy, where the believer's life is sustained through a 'hidden' inner reality of connectedness with God's Spirit; protection, through being found in God; and identity based in connection to, or being in, the risen Christ.

3.5 Literary Analysis

3.5.1 Genre

The general genre of Colossians is an epistle or letter. The specific genre of the Col 3:1-3 passage is seen as exhortation, but various scholars have suggested alternatives. Levison (1989:93) in his writings describes the passage as apocalyptic. Dunn (1996:199) views the passage as a transitional passage moving from doctrinal statements to application. Wilson (2005:234) argues the passage is a summary of the previous chapters. In light of the lexical and grammatical analysis, I agree with Dunn and Wilson's interpretation of these verses being a transitional passage summarising the previous chapters and introducing the content Paul will address in the subsequent chapters.

3.5.2 Structure

The general structure of the letter to the Colossians divides the book into two sections with the Col 3:1-3 passage being the transition. Hood (2009:2) argues the specific structure of Col 3:1-3 alternates between doctrinal precepts and exhortations or as Gragg (1961:71) describes, between indicative or fact and imperative or function.

Hood suggests in Col 3:1-3 the doctrinal or indicative statements are: "... you have been raised with Christ ...", "... where Christ is ...", and "... you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God". The exhortation or imperative statements are: "... set your hearts on things above ...", and "Set your minds ..."

3.5.3 Rhetoric

Dunn (1996:203) describes Colossians 3:1-3 as containing language that's metaphorical rather than literal. Dunn highlights concepts like the believers resurrection as metaphorical because this event was something that still lay in the future. The exhortation to 'seek things above' indicates Paul was encouraging a change in perspective rather than an ontological change.

Paul uses formulaic imagery in Col 3:1 "... seated at the right hand of God" that Thompson (2005:69-70) describes is reflecting Ps 100:1 "The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet". The image Paul presents was a clear explanation of the resurrected and ascended Christ. Bullinger (1968:871,880) describe this figure of speech as Anthropopatheia or

Condescension and is defined as the “... ascribing of human passions, actions, or attributes to God.” Bullinger explains the fact that God is attributed with a right hand indicates power and authority, but also grace and mercy.

Verse 3 and 4, according to Bullinger (1968:720), form the figure of speech of Anacoluthon or Non-Sequence and are a “... breaking off the sequence of thought ... the figure not only imparts grace, but strength and force to the language, and is intended to catch and fix the attention of the reader.”

3.6 Exegetical Synthesis

In this transitional passage in Colossians Paul links what he has written previously to what he is about to address. Paul’s major concern in writing to the Colossian believers is the deceit presented by false teachers and the apparent ease of the believers taking on this teaching as truth.

The primary themes of Colossians are the sole sufficiency of Christ, Christology and Eschatology. Colossians 3:1-3 begins by clearly reminding the believers that they have already been resurrected with Christ – this was a past event that did not require legalistic acts, etc to become perfect, but was a result of Christ alone. Paul was addressing the tension of living in the Kingdom of God now while its fullness is yet to come.

Paul links Col 3:1 “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ ...” to Col 2:20 “Since you died with Christ ...” connecting Colossians 3 to his concerns with the new believers falling into the deceit false teachers were presenting. Paul encourages the believers to remember their baptism and resurrection with Christ and not to be deceived by false teaching; to remember who they truly are in Christ because they have joined Christ in his death and resurrection.

Paul continues exhorting the believers to keep seeking heavenly things rather than focusing on earthly things – to remember how they were saved; the sole sufficiency of Christ for them; and to remember the position of Christ – his power, authority, grace and mercy towards them and not allow themselves to be deceived by false teaching again.

The impact of the genre and structure facilitate building the impact and significance of the words Paul was using. Paul used indicative and imperative statements to connect the previous chapters to the subsequent chapters, but at the same time emphasizing the message of exhorting the believers to remember their baptism and resurrection in Christ and imploring them not to fall into the deceit of the false teachings. The literary devices employed create a greater weight or emphasis on Paul's words to the Colossians.

3.7 Conclusion

The exegesis of Col 3:1-3 covered five main sections namely; preliminary analysis of the text, contextual analysis, verbal analysis, literary analysis, and concluded with exegetical synthesis drawing out what the author of the letter intended the original readers to understand from the pericope. The next chapter will address the significance of Col 3:1-3 today. The chapter focuses on the doctrinal and practical significance and practical application of the pericope to the modern day reader.

Chapter 4

Significance of Colossians 3:1-3

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the exegesis of Col 3:1-3 utilising preliminary analysis, contextual analysis, verbal analysis, literary analysis, concluding with exegetical synthesis in order to understand what the author intended for the original readers to understand from the pericope.

The primary focus of the ensuing chapter is to discover the significance of Col 3:1-3 for modern believers, and specifically how this passage applies within the specific ministry context of the author in discipleship of 'Generation z' believers. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section will address the doctrinal significance of the pericope, while focusing specifically on the aspects of the all sufficiency of Christ, the positional truth of the believer, and living a Christocentric life. The second section will deal with the practical significance of the passage for modern believers, while the final section will highlight the practical application of Colossians 3:1-3 for the modern believer, particularly focusing on application for ministry to, and Christian growth within, 'Generation z' believers.

4.2 Doctrinal Significance

Colossians 3:1-3 is a transitional passage moving from the doctrinal section of the letter to the application segment. These three verses summarise what Paul has written in the previous chapters, describing the all sufficiency of Christ and the positional truth of the believer. The verses also prepare the believer for the final chapters by describing how to live a Christocentric life.

4.2.1 All Sufficiency of Christ

Sumney (2008:177) describes, when the letter to the Colossians was written the view of heaven was of various levels in which gods and spiritual powers dwelt. The higher levels contained the more powerful spiritual beings, while humans dwelt on a lower level. In light of this view, Paul describes Christ in Col 3:1 as dwelling in the highest level and the believer's life is hidden and secure in Christ in this highest level.

Dunn (1996:203) explains an importance aspect of Col 3:1-3 is that Christ has been raised from the dead and exalted to sit at God's right hand. Sumney (2008:177-178) adds, Christ is seated in the highest level, in the place of highest honour. This position describes a place of power and authority. A similar picture of the risen victorious Christ is presented in Ps 110:1, Heb 8:1, 12:2 and Rev 20:11-15.

The picture Paul presented of Christ in Colossians 3:1-3 is clear – He has defeated the enemy and "... is the head over every power and authority" (Col 2:10). This imagery summarises how Paul described Christ in Colossians 1:

- (a) "He is the image of the invisible God ..." (Col 1:15).
- (b) In his death and resurrection, Christ has "... rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son ..." (1:13).
- (c) Christ has "...reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach ..." (1:22).
- (d) Christ is sovereign: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him" (1:16)
- (e) The Sustainer of all things: "... in him all things hold together" (1:17):
- (f) Christ is supreme over all things because all the fullness of God dwells in Christ (Shultz, 2010:449): "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ..." (1:19).

Paul was communicating that we are secure in Christ in the highest heavenly realms in his power and authority. Through his death and resurrection we are transferred into the Kingdom of God now, although its fullness is yet to come.

4.2.2 Positional Truth of the Believer

The opening of verse one declares as factual the positional truth of the believer. The verse was written to draw the reader back to Col 2:20, and links together the fact that as a believer they have died (Col 2:20) and have been raised with Christ (Col 3:1). Cragg (1961:72-73) describes the believer as being united with Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, describing the believer as being in Christ and he is in the believer – partakers of Christ in his redeeming work. In the letter to the Ephesians Paul describes "... God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus ..." (Eph 2:6).

Paul exhorted believers not to be deceived by false teaching but rather understand their death with Christ severed their tie with the old world-order; with unspiritual matters; with legalistic and external observances, which as Bruce (1984:132) describes, was attempting to enforce its control and dominion on them again. Moo (2008:249) adds, that it can be inferred Paul also saw this death as separating the believer from sin and bondage to the law. Rather, Paul encouraged believers to realise their resurrection with Christ has "... established new links, binding them to a new and heavenly order, to that spiritual kingdom in which Christ their Lord was sovereign" (Bruce 1984:132).

In verse three Paul repeats the truth that the believer has died with Christ and their life is hidden with Christ. As Moo (2008:250) explains, the hidden / revealed motif could refer to Jewish apocalyptic worldview which believed "... many things relating to God and his purposes exist in the present, but because they are in heaven, they are hidden from human sight." This motif describes a perspective that the believer's heavenly identity is real, but rooted in the veiled reality of the heavenly realm. Moo proposes an additional thought, that the believer's life is hidden in Christ and therefore his life is safe and secure in Christ – nothing can touch this life. I believe these views can be complementary in describing the fullness of the 'hidden' motif.

4.2.3 Living a Christocentric Life

As Dunn (1996:203) describes, the believer's resurrection Paul depicts was metaphorical at this time, not literal. The believer's physical resurrection lies in the

future. Paul was rather describing a change of perspective for the believer; an aligning of perspective with God's truth that underscores the idea that our resurrection is both now, but not yet (1 John 5:10-12, 1 Thess 4:16-17).

Wall (1993:130) explains the integration of the indicative (doctrine) and imperative (application) moods in this passage expresses a connection between what one believes and how one lives. Paul expressed a similar concept in Galatians when he wrote, "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16) and "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25).

(a) Set your Heart on things above: The believer has participated in the death and resurrection of Christ and is hidden in Him, and therefore Paul exhorts the believer to set his heart on things above. Matt 6:31-34 presents a similar picture where Jesus exhorts believers to "...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Sumney (2008:177) describes this process of 'setting your heart on things above' as the believer living out of his connectedness with God. House (1994:165) adds that it is a "... continual, ongoing process ..." not a once off event.

Indeed, one of the roles of the Spirit in us is to testify that we are children of God and empower us to live according to the spiritual nature (Romans 8:5-17, Galatians 5:16-25). 1 Corinthians 2: 12-16 states, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us...we have the mind of Christ."

Sumney (2008:177) continues, that 'setting your heart' on God requires rejecting human wisdom and philosophies and rather living according to the instruction of the letter to the Colossians, which include:

- (i) "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5).
- (ii) "... rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips" (Col 3:8).

(iii) "... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col 3:12).

(iv) "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col 3:12).

(v) "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ..." (Col 3:15).

(vi) "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another ..." (Col 3:16).

This instruction to 'put off the old self' and 'put on the new self' is also reflected in Eph 4 and 5. Obviously, setting your heart on things above involves a deliberate choosing of thoughts and actions focussed on the eternal heavenly realm as contrasted to putting off our old self with its thoughts and actions bent toward the temporal and sin.

(b) Set your Mind on things Above: Dunn (1996:205) explains the verb 'set' doesn't just refer to 'think about an issue', but rather to have a 'settled understanding or opinion' on an issue. Paul expressed a similar concept in Romans when he wrote, "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Rom 8:5). Harris (1995:138) adds the word 'mind' emphasises an inner attitude (approach, outlook, position, a consistent way of thinking), rather than a practical action, required for the focussing of your mind on heaven.

Rogers and Rogers (1998:466) add that the difference between 'set your mind' (vs. 2) and 'set your heart' (vs. 1) is that Paul is explaining to the believer's to focus on an inner attitude in this verse, whereas the previous verb focused on a practical pursuit.

Lucas (1980:136) views Paul's exhortation as a reminder to the believer to use the renewed mind so as to be able to discern Christ's will. However, I agree with Thompson (2005:71) who states 'setting your mind on things above' does not describe constantly thinking only about God, but rather it is an orientation of "... one's life and devotion to God rather than to the self or world."

4.3 Practical Significance of Colossians 3:1-3 for Modern Believers

Walsh and Keesmaat (2005:98-99) explain, Paul's letter to the Colossians focused on answering questions about evil and how it's overcome, who rules the world, where the world came from and where it is headed. "The worldview on offer here seeks to provide this young Christian community [Colossian believers] with a fundamental orientation in life." The Colossian believers are young converts to Christianity (Col 1:3-8). They started well, but were led away from the truth by false teaching (Col 2:16-23).

Köstenberger writes:

The term "truth" had currency in Greek philosophy, Roman thought, and the Hebrew Bible (including its many uses in the LXX). In Greek philosophy, one of the senses of *aletheia* involved an accurate perspective on reality. Romans similarly spoke of *veritas* as a factual representation of events. In the Hebrew Scriptures, "truth" (*emeth, emunah*) primarily conveyed the notion of God's faithfulness. This faithfulness had been revealed throughout the history of Israel and, according to John, found supreme expression in the life, ministry, and substitutionary death of Jesus ([John]1:14; 14:6).

Jesus declared in John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life." This definition of truth relates to God and Jesus' relationship with the Father and Spirit – Jesus is truth incarnate. Indeed, John 15:26 describes "... the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father - he will testify about me."

As such, truth is absolute and revealed by God through general (God's world), specific (the Bible) and personal (his will for the individual) revelation. These will never conflict with each other, thus any deviances are due to interpretation, integration or expression of the truth by the individual or community.

In Colossians 3:15-16 Paul refers to "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts (personal revelation through his Spirit) Let the message (specific revelation) of Christ dwell in you richly ..." Paul alluded to the problem of deviances in interpretation and expression in Galatians 1:6-7, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ." It can be concluded from

these verses that Paul believed in the various forms of revelation and that there should be absolute integrity in their integration, interpretation, and expression.

Presently, we see a similar pattern to the Colossian believers of falsely integrating, interpreting and expressing truth occurring within the postmodern 'Generation z' believers. According to Mercadante (2008:2, 10) 'Generation z', the 'Millennium Generation' or named 'Generation i' by other scholars, was born between 1982 and 2002 and "... are indigenous to the postmodern era". Postmodernism is defined by Purdy (2010:106) as "... the intellect is replaced by will, reason by emotion, and morality by relativism. The individual's identity comes from a group. Reality is nothing more than a social construct". Purdy (2010:106) quotes Crouse, who further defines post modernity characterised by "... fragmentation, indeterminacy, and a distrust of all universalizing (worldviews) and power structures (the establishments). It is a worldview that denies all worldviews ("stories"). It says that there are no universal truths valid for all people."

The postmodern 'Generation z' Christian begins with passion and excitement, but post modern thought, as defined below, often becomes a stumbling block. In my ministry context discipling youth from many nations for mission training (Disciple Training Schools with Youth With A Mission), these believers are inundated with post modern ideas through media and education and, although post modern thought is not blatantly taught in the church, it is fed through outdated modes of teaching and failure to address foundations of the faith with new language that is meaningful to 'Generation z'. Christian clichés and old ways of explaining faith mean nothing to this generation. Many are first generation Christians who are applying and integrating Christian 'truth' to a bedrock of post modern thought. If the Church is not addressing this and continuing to teach on the assumption that the bedrock is Jesus, then they are (in my experience) generating Christians who continue to believe false teaching with Christianity merely layered and integrated into that foundation.

Neufeld (2002:¶3) describes common features of the postmodern generation are described by words such as "... secularism, pluralism, relativism, existentialism, individualism, and materialism.... the new culture is Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, and Communal." Again, in my ministry context I see this manifesting in youth believing and expressing Christian truth when it is easy and comfortable. God

is there to make them happy and to meet their emotional and material needs. God loves them when everything is comfortable, and does not when things are not going according to the individuals plan. Their Christians lives are often an emotional rollercoaster that fluctuates with circumstances and the feedback from their peer group. The world and their faith revolve around themselves with God being another resource to benefit the self. There is little concept of suffering, putting others first, unconditional love, or laying down rights. Often these concepts are met with withdrawal and aggression and Scriptural truths are answered with, “you can’t tell me what to do.”

According to Purdy (2010:106-107) postmodernism rejects 1) the idea that truth is universal, objective, defined and absolute, but rather truth is seen as something that I choose or make it out to be; and 2) truth is constructed by the view of the group or society, rather than universal and absolute. God’s absolute truth presented in the Bible is rejected because it doesn’t fit in the postmodern view of truth.

The Barna Groups research project in 2011 on why young people leave church the results included:

(1) One-fifth saying that “God seems missing from my experience of church” (20%).

(2) Research indicates that most young Christians are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers.

(3) ‘Generation z’s are shaped by culture that honours open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance. They are the most diverse generation in American history in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, technological tools and sources of authority. ‘Generation z’ Christians (29%) said “churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths”.

(4) ‘Generation z’s with Christian experience say the church does not let them express doubts. They are not able to ask their “most pressing life questions in church” (36%) nor express “significant intellectual doubts about my faith” (23%).

While The Barna Groups research project focuses on young American believers, Hendricks (2004:5) explains “... Africa is in no uncertain way being affected by global mega-trends.” Smith (2009:13) states, African churches aren’t impervious to the

issues of post modernism. South Africa isn't a straightforward case though as the youth fall into pre-modernism, modernism and post modernism categories. However similar problems found in the rest of the world, are found in South Africa too.

Kitching (n.d.:15) agrees with Hendricks and Smith explaining that the biggest aspect of the change from modernity to post modernity for African youth has been the "... move from a culture in which personal identity and social integration were found through production and the work-place--rootedness in the past ... to a culture based on consumption, the market and personal choice, now." Kitching (n.d.:20) adds, that since the removal of apartheid, African youth are having to face the full consequences of post modernism.

The individual principles of post modernity in and of themselves do not necessarily result in false beliefs. Objectivity; asking questions and expressing doubts; being experiential; participatory; interactive; and communal are all positive principles and can be strengths. Nevertheless, when truth is not assumed to be absolute as defined by God in the person of Jesus Christ, but rather defined by what I choose to make it into or what society tells me it is, believers are drawn away from a Biblical standard of truth into deception. This results in believers in a similar situation to those addressed by Paul in Colossae.

4.4 Practical Application of Colossians 3:1-3 for Modern Believers

While we do not know the specific heresy Paul was addressing in Colossae, we can assume that what Paul wrote to the church countered the deceit of the false teaching (O'Brien, 1982:31). In the same way, as we disciple 'Generation z' we need to address the 'false teaching' they have accepted and present God's truth as the real alternative.

Paul is writing to a group of believers, who according to the Colossians, appear to have taken on a false teaching that was introducing a new philosophy (2:8), resubmitting to human traditions (2:8), not dependant on Christ (2:8, 19), observance of holy days and food and purity laws (2:16), and adherence to legalism (2:20-23). In summary, the false teaching questioned the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in the lives of the believers (Moo, 2008:52).

The postmodern worldview creates a similar form of 'false teaching' in the lives of 'Generation z' believers. Reality and identity is informed by their social groups; there is no universal truth - God's absolute standard of truth is replaced by a truth that is defined by what they believe or feel about a situation; and intellect is replaced by will, reason by emotion – decisions are made more by a 'gut reaction' than on truth, fact and logic.

Paul's solution to the false teaching in Colossians is to present the absolute, universal, Biblical truth, as defined previously, to the believers. He implored them to "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy ..." (Col 2:8). Paul reminded the believers of:

(a) The truth of who Christ is: "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col 1:15) and what Christ had accomplished on the cross: "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation ..." (Col 1:22).

(b) Who they were in Christ: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:1, 3).

(c) How they were to live out a successful, Christ focused life: "... just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col 2:6-7). Every area of deceit is addressed.

As Paul transitioned from doctrine to application, he linked these two sections with an exhortation to the Colossians that "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:1-3). Paul's cry to the Colossian believers is to focus on, believe, set their hearts and minds continually on the truth of who Christ is and what he accomplished on the cross for believers and subsequently where the believer stands in Christ, without which they would continue to live life in captivity to false teachings (Col 2:8).

Paul's use of words in Col 3:1-3 emphasised setting your heart on things above is a practical pursuit, an ongoing, continual process, constant habitual action, a living out of a connectedness with God (Sumney, 2008:177). Setting your mind on things above is having a settled understanding or opinion (Dunn, 1996:205). It emphasises an inner attitude, a renewing of your mind, an orientation of one's life to one's relationship with God.

As Fowler (1981:295) states,

Most often faith is understood as belief in certain propositional, doctrinal formulations ... but if faith is relational, a pledging of trust and fidelity to another, and a way of moving into the force field of life trusting in dynamic centres of values and power, then the "truth" of faith takes on a different quality. Truth is *lived*; it is a pattern of being in relation to others and to God.

'Generation z' believers struggling with a postmodern worldview should be encouraged to follow Paul's advice to the Colossians – they need to set their hearts and minds on the spiritual things above and on God's truth, not continue to follow deceptive aspects of post modernity.

Fee (2007:132-133) describes believers who walk according to the Spirit, live a contrasting life to those living out of the flesh. Believers living according to the Spirit live their lives with their minds

...set on the things of the Spirit (their minds have been renewed by the Spirit, after all); in place of hostility to God, they live in peace; and instead of death, they know life.... [Paul reminds] them that by the Spirit they must continue to kill that to which they have already died (the already/not yet again). They were formerly controlled by, and thus under obligation to, the flesh. Their new obligation is to the Spirit, to walk in his ways, led by him...

(a) Set your Heart on things Above: The first step is an inner choice to believe God's standard for truth. This is an ongoing process of continually choosing the truth of God over determining truth through how they feel or what they believe about a situation or topic. It is a choice to daily take practical steps of obedience to walk in God's truth.

Practically, it is making the choice to believe in Christ as he is described in the Word of God: he is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15); sovereign (Col 1:16); sustainer of all things (Col 1:17) and supreme over all (Col 1:19).

It is the making the choice to believe that what Christ accomplished for us through the Cross has truly occurred. Christ has rescued us from darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of light (Col 1:13); Christ has reconciled us through death on the cross (Col 1:22); and we are now holy and blameless and beyond reproach (Col 1:22).

Practicing spiritual disciplines is a way to maintain focus on truth and heavenly things. In a study done by the Pew Research centre in 2012 by Anderson and Rainie (2012:¶2) on the effects of hyper connectivity “experts predicted that the impact of networked living on today’s young will drive them to thirst for instant gratification, settle for quick choices, and lack patience.” In my ministry context I see that our students lack self discipline with work, quiet times, and homework. They also struggle to continually press in to relationships or worship (for example) if there are not instant benefits or if it is difficult. Further, they often fail to see their own responsibility or what they could change, but are quick to blame others for the results. To counter that, Foster (1988:1) writes,

The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life (meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration) call us to move beyond surface living into the depths.

Foster goes on to explain that the Disciplines in and of themselves accomplish nothing, but are God’s means of transforming us and extending grace.

In a 2008 survey on ‘Generation z’s experience and thoughts on spiritual growth, the Search Institute (2008:§1) stated “Young people say that everyday experiences—“being in nature, listening to or performing music, being alone”—and relationships with friends and family as helping them the most in growing spiritually.” I have found this true in my ministry context also. The more we focus on bonding the students together in small groups and as a school, the more they are known through one on ones and in the peer group, the more spiritual growth we see. Music and worship are also powerful ways to engage our students and open their hearts and minds to God. This would indicate that the relational aspect of small groups or life groups could be

of benefit to 'Generation z's forming habits of setting their hearts and minds on things above, as could be experiences of worship and solitude.

(b) Set your Mind on things Above: The next step is having a settled opinion or understanding of God's truth. Practically this requires settling in your mind that God's truth is the foundational truth you will live by. It is committing yourself to live according to this truth and allowing God to renew your mind through the reading of his Word.

It is a deep conviction of the believer's position in Christ and the unwavering position that Christ's death and resurrection altered reality for believers. We have died. We are raised. We are hidden. We live and abide in a new reality where our identity is in Christ and as such set our intellectual and heart compass to the truth of this new life and reality. We live radically according to our new position.

As we continually set our minds on Christ's all-sufficiency for salvation and sanctification it will both transform all aspects of our lives and safe-guard us from false teaching. These truths, as defined by God in Jesus and empowered through the Spirit, become the foundation and guideposts for our questions, experiences, interactions and community. As Fowler (1988:14) describes, faith involves an "... alignment of the will, a resting of the heart, in accordance with a vision of transcendent value and power, one's ultimate concern...[it] is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions."

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the significance of Col 3:1-3 for modern believers, specifically how key themes apply, within the specific ministry context of discipleship of 'Generation z' believers. This was achieved through exploring the doctrinal significance of the pericope, the practical significance of the passage for modern believers and finally, the practical application of Colossians 3:1-3 for the modern believer. The final chapter of the thesis draws together and summaries the major findings of this research work.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The process followed by the thesis is primarily the theological research model presented by Smith & Woodbridge (2008). The thesis utilised the following steps: Chapter one identified the problem, objectives, the research methodology and structure of the thesis. Chapter two addressed the context of the Letter to the Colossians. Chapter three conducted an exegesis of Colossians 3:1-3 and Chapter four looked at the doctrinal and practical significance for Christians today.

The primary themes of Colossians are the sole sufficiency of Christ, Christology and Eschatology. Colossians 3:1-3 links together the doctrinal and application sections of the letter and reminds the believers to keep seeking heavenly things rather than focusing on earthly things. Through the passage Paul exhorted the believers to remember how they were saved; the sole sufficiency of Christ for them; and to not forget the position of Christ signifying his power and authority, and grace and mercy towards them.

Paul wrote Col 3:1-3 exhorting the new believers to avoid falling into the deceit of false teachers. He urged them to keep in mind their baptism and resurrection with Christ - to remember who they truly are in Christ because they had joined Him in his death and resurrection.

The doctrinal significance of Colossians 3:1-3 includes the focus on (1) Christ's resurrection and exaltation to sit on God's right hand, a place of highest honour describing a position of power and authority. (2) The believer has been united with Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, and is a partaker of Christ in his redeeming work – they have been included in a spiritual kingdom in which Christ is sovereign. (3) The believer has participated in the death and resurrection of Christ

and is hidden in Him and therefore Paul exhorts the believer to (i) set their hearts on things above – an ongoing process of living out of connectedness with God focused on the eternal, and (ii) set their minds on things above – to have a settled understanding or opinion; an orientation of one’s life and devotion towards God. Paul was encouraging the believers to live in the reality of who they are in Christ now, while acknowledge the tension of living in a sinful world with the fullness of our salvation being yet to come.

‘Generation z’ postmodern believers maintain a worldview with similar form to the ‘false teaching’ in Colossians - God’s absolute standard of truth is replaced by a truth that is defined either by what they believe or feel about a situation or by the definition society or peer groups provide. As Paul exhorted the Colossians to set their hearts on things above, so this generation must do likewise. An ongoing process of choosing to believe and live out God’s standard for truth is required where identity is rooted in Christ, reality in his Kingdom, and power and transformation in his Spirit.

Furthermore, this generation must set their minds on things above by having a settled opinion or understanding of God’s truth. It is a once and for all committing to live according to God’s truth and allowing Him to renew their minds through the reading of his Word and the transforming and enabling power of his Spirit. It is trusting God for both salvation and sanctification. It is a deep conviction of their position as believers in Christ and the unwavering position that Christ’s death and resurrection has altered their reality now, even though the fullness of eternity with Christ is yet to come.

As such, the church must be encouraged to formulate new meaningful language, idioms and metaphors to communicate foundational truths of Christianity that will generate new thought patterns and expose the false beliefs of post modern Christians. This coupled with meaningful strategies that capitalise on post modern preferences such as small groups and worship and address the weaknesses of post modernism such as returning to the disciplines, will result in a new generation of Christian youth who have their hearts and minds set where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God because they have died, and their life is hidden with Christ in God.

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