

Colossians, “Because of their link with the fullness of deity through Christ, by definition there can be nothing lacking about their relation with God, no deficiency that needs to be filled by further teachings and practices offered by the philosophy.”¹⁰⁴

Colossians 3:1-4

“your life is hidden with Messiah in God”

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Messiah, keep seeking the things above, where Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Messiah in God. When Messiah, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

This part of Paul’s message, in his letter to the Colossians, serves as a positive counterpart to the previous negative critique of the false philosophy.¹⁰⁵ Instruction is specifically delivered on how Yeshua the Messiah offers power to Believers, enabling them to overcome sinful temptations—a power that the false teaching of the Colossian errorists cannot provide. The ability to live properly before God cannot be attained by the ascetic practices circulating in Colossae (Colossians 2:18-21), but instead *only* by the Colossians being united with Yeshua. The Apostle Paul teaches the Colossians about their new identity in the Messiah (Colossians 3:1-4), that they are to put off their old sinful ways (Colossians 3:5-11) and put on new godly ways (Colossians 3:12-17), and about some of the responsibilities that those who live properly have, in order to demonstrate right service to the Lord (Colossians 3:18-4:1).¹⁰⁶

Compared to what has thus far been written, the tone of the remainder of the epistle is relatively positive (simply see the contrast between Colossians 2:20 and 3:1). The emphasis is, “So if you have been raised with the Messiah, seek what is above, where the Messiah is” (Colossians 3:1, HCSB). In order for his readers to truly understand the profundity of who the Messiah is, Paul admonishes “keep seeking the things above,” specifically employing *zēteite* (ζητεῖτε), a present active imperative verb. The NIV understands this to be “set your hearts on things above,” as Colossians 3:2 will specifically admonish the audience to use their minds *to think* about Yeshua. We can be reminded of how Paul similarly instructed the Philippians, “brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

The Colossians, in considering the Lord Yeshua, are to live the life of the realm of Heaven—where Yeshua is sovereign (Psalm 110)—**while living on Earth**. Born again Believers are connected to Heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47-49; Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20), but not in some kind of an ethereal way. The life of Heaven will be manifested in concrete, righteous actions of faith in the saints. Lincoln observes, “In the face of the insistence on ascetic observances in order to participate in heavenly life, [the author] asserts that through God’s gracious initiative the readers have already been brought into such life.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Wright reminds us, “The Bible does not say much about heaven. But its central feature is clear: it is the

¹⁰⁴ Lincoln, in *NIB*, 11:623.

¹⁰⁵ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.

¹⁰⁶ Interpreters like Dunn, who would advocate that the Colossians were being persuaded against entering into the Jewish Synagogue, claim that this section of verses “provide[s] a counterweight to the evident attractiveness of the more traditional Jewish lifestyle” (Dunn, *Colossians-Philemon*, 203).

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln, in *NIB*, 11:637.

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place where the crucified Christ already reigns, where his people already have full rights of citizenship.”¹⁰⁸

In some ways, Paul actually agrees with the false teachers, in that the attention of the Colossians needs to be directed toward another dimension. He instructs, “mind the things above, not the things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2, LITV), as the verb *phroneō* (φρονέω) means “to give careful consideration to someth., set one’s mind on, be intent on” (BDAG).¹⁰⁹ But rather than focus on angels or any other spiritual intermediaries (Colossians 2:18), the focus of the Colossians is to be on Yeshua seated at the Father’s right hand (cf. Colossians 2:9). Certainly to be considered is Paul’s previous teaching on “the Jerusalem above” (Galatians 4:26) and the “upward call” (Philippians 3:14) that Believers possess. *IVPBBC* summaries how “The Jewish mystics creating problems at Colossae were probably seeking these upper realms through mystical experiences (2:18), but Paul only mentions one thing specifically in heaven: Christ.”¹¹⁰

The affections and thoughts of the Colossians are to be focused on Yeshua the Messiah, “seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1). Psalm 110:1, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (previously discussed), formed a major part of early Apostolic theology regarding the exaltation and Divinity of Yeshua (Acts 2:33-35; 5:31; 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 3:21). These are concurrent with Yeshua’s own claims about Himself (Matthew 26:64; Mark 12:36-37; Luke 20:41-44), and the Son of Man vision the Prophet Daniel was able to see (Daniel 7:9-14). Interestingly enough, the Talmud records how the Jewish Rabbi Aqiba was rebuked for arguing that a second throne was placed in Heaven for the Messiah:

“One verse of Scripture states, ‘His throne was fiery flames’ (Dan. 7:9), but elsewhere it is written, ‘Till thrones were places, and one that was ancient of days did sit’ (Dan. 7:9)! *No problem, the one is for him, the other for David, in line with what has been taught on Tannaite authority: ‘One is for him, the other for David,’ the words of R. Aqiba. Said to him R. Yosé the Galilean, ‘Aqiba, how long are you going to treat in a profane way the Presence of God?’*” (b.Hagigah 14a).¹¹¹

If Yeshua the Messiah sits at His Father’s right hand, then it is obvious that the Colossians’ attention needs to be directed to and focused around Him, seen in the imperative verb *phroneite* (φρονείτε). In the Tanach, the imagery of the right hand is one that expresses great power and authority (Exodus 15:6, 12; Psalm 16:11; 17:7; 20:6; 44:3; 60:5; 73:23; 98:1; 118:15-16). Beyond this, Yeshua possesses the highest of power “far above all the heavens” (Ephesians 4:10), and is to be the One to whom all Creation will one day bow as LORD (Philippians 2:10-11; cf. Isaiah 45:23). *This is to all be sure motivation to live properly.* Moo describes, “We are not to strive for a ‘heavenly’ status, since that has already been freely given us in Christ. Rather, we are to make that heavenly status the guidepost for all our thinking and acting.”¹¹²

In directing his audience to think on Heavenly things, there is a definite subversion of the false philosophy’s thought that things of the Earth were evil. Paul concurs that the attention of the Colossians needs to be focused on Heaven, but in so doing he masterfully turns what the false teachers advocate against themselves. O’Brien summaries how Paul “outclasses his opponents on their own ground, not completely disparaging their concern with the heavenly

¹⁰⁸ Wright, *Colossians-Philemon*, 132.

¹⁰⁹ BDAG, 1065.

¹¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 578.

¹¹¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

¹¹² Moo, *Colossians-Philemon*, 246.

realm but rather redirecting it, at the same time exposing its false premises about contacting this realm through legalistic observances."¹¹³

In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul had observed how “we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” In instructing people to focus on eternal things in the realm of Heaven, no good theologian honestly argues that Paul opposes physical things—like the later Gnostics of the Second Century—but was instead often using the contrast of worldly/Heavenly as a warning about how possessing a physical body can often lead to physical sins. Paul wants people to live their lives on Earth in accordance with what exists above. Bruce further indicates,

“The Gnostics also believed in aiming at what was above...But Paul has in mind a higher plane than theirs...Don’t look at life from the standpoint of these lower planes; look at them from Christ’s exalted viewpoint. Judge everything by the standards of that new creation to which you belong, not by those of the old order to which you have said a final farewell.”¹¹⁴

In instructing the Colossians to live righteously, Paul picks up the previous theme of how they have “died” with the Messiah (Colossians 2:12, 20), meaning that His sacrificial death on their behalf affects how they are to die to the power of sin. He says in Colossians 2:3, “For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God” (NLT). The only real hidden, or secret things, that the Colossians need to be concerned about, are already found with the life that they possess in the Messiah—something God has purposed. The usage of “hidden” here is perhaps about as close to speaking of anything secretive or mystic that Paul gets in his letter. He refers to the fact that the Colossian Believers are to live within God’s realm, untouchable by anyone. Yeshua is the One in whom true knowledge and wisdom is to be found (Colossians 2:3), things that born again Believers raised with Him into a new life are to demonstrate. Dunn describes, “Paul and Timothy were evidently wholly confident that this perspective, this hidden resource, would provide all the wisdom needed to cope with the challenges and problems of daily living.”¹¹⁵

Another view of the Colossians having a hidden life in the Messiah, is how the language of “hidden” is used in the Tanach regarding safety. 1 Samuel 13:6 records how, “When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits.” Psalm 27:5 also exclaims, “For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock.”¹¹⁶

What are the ramifications of dying with the Messiah? Paul has previously expressed how “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10). He also had previously taught how Believers are to “always [be] carrying about in the body the dying of Yeshua, so that the life of Yeshua also may be manifested in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10). To one degree or another, the sufferings that the Messiah experienced on our behalf, are to be emulated in the way that we conduct ourselves. This does not mean that we are to physically torture ourselves, similar to the ascetic regulations of the false teachers (Colossians 2:21-23), but ethically our character is to be one of self-less service and love to each other. Dying to our sinful selves will enable us to

¹¹³ O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 161.

¹¹⁴ Bruce, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 134.

Dunn disagrees that a Pauline subversion of some kind of Jewish-Gnostic philosophy is in view in Colossians 3:1-2, instead arguing that subversion of an apocalyptic Jewish view is seen throughout Colossians ch. 3, perhaps as evident in literature like 2 *Baruch* 48:42-52:7 (Dunn, *Colossians-Philemon*, 202).

¹¹⁵ Dunn, *Colossians-Philemon*, 207.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Moo, *Colossians-Philemon*, 250.

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understand the magnificence of the Messiah's exaltation. Dunnam considers this to be how, "The risen and exalted Lord conquered death. We do not wait for eternal life; it is ours now. Risen with Christ, the glorious privilege of beginning now the life with Christ which will continue eternally is ours."¹¹⁷

The resurrection of the dead surely awaits us in the future—but **the life of the resurrection is to be a present experience now**. Wright observes, "There is a perfect balance here between the 'already' and the 'not yet' that are so characteristic of Paul's teaching...The new age has dawned, and Christians already belong to it. The old age, however, is not yet wound up, and until they die (or until the Lord 'appears' again in his second coming) their new life will be a secret truth."¹¹⁸ Paul taught in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." John also says, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Lincoln offers a good summary of what the "hidden" life of Believers entails: "This passage can serve...as a reminder that the real new age began with the resurrection of Jesus—not with a planetary shift from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius."¹¹⁹ While Heavenly, the life of Believers is to be lived out on an Earth marred by sin—specifically so others can be impacted with the transforming power of the gospel!

So serious is the life of Believers, that the Apostle Paul actually asserts "When Messiah, who is {y}our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). The key statement here is *ho Christos phanerōthē, hē zōē humōn* (ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν). There is some strong manuscript evidence that points to *humōn* or "your" (NIV, NRSV, ESV, HCSB) actually being the original reading, as opposed to *hēmōn* (ἡμῶν) or "our."¹²⁰ O'Brien notes how any change between *humōn* and *hēmōn* "may have been due to faulty hearing or because a copyist wished to maintain the point that Christ is the life of Christians generally and not simply of those at Colossae."¹²¹ If "Christ, who is your life" (NIV), is the more original reading, it does not significantly change anything—because by extension the Messiah is the life of all Believers. The Apostle Paul himself recognized how Yeshua was *his life*: "it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Rhetorically, "Messiah, who is your life," would have placed a significant responsibility upon the Colossians to make sure that Yeshua was at the center of their faith (Colossians 1:27).

Hearing "Messiah, who is {y}our life" in Colossians 3:4 is something that today's Messianics need to take very serious note of. This is not often something we hear in our congregations and assemblies—as opposed to the declaration "Torah is life." While Deuteronomy 32:46-47 does indeed say, "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today...all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life [*ki-hu cha'yeikhem, כִּי-הוּא חַיֵּיכֶם*]," this is speaking of how the Torah's commandments are to be *the sphere of conduct* in which Ancient Israel, and certainly God's people today, are to

¹¹⁷ Dunnam, 372.

¹¹⁸ Wright, *Colossians-Philemon*, 132.

¹¹⁹ Lincoln, in *NIB*, 11:640.

¹²⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 624.

¹²¹ O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 157 fn #a.

live and find themselves (materially) blessed.¹²² The point made in Colossians 3:1-4 is that having died to sin, and raised to new life with the Messiah, He is to be the source of where **eternal life** is found. There is no problem with today's Messianic movement placing a proper emphasis on the Torah as the high standard of God's holiness; but there is a problem when "Torah is life" equaling the means of inheriting eternal life is emphasized.¹²³

For a man like Paul, "to live is Messiah and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Regardless of what happened in his life—even whether he lived or died—he did what he did because of who Yeshua was to him. Placing Yeshua at the center of one's being involves living properly in the current world, and looking forward to a future world where He reigns on Earth. O'Brien considers this to be "the life of the age to come which will be received on the final day and which through the resurrection of Christ from the dead has become for the believer a present reality,"¹²⁴ in what we might call an inaugurated eschatology. John's writings employ language that speaks of how those who belong to Yeshua pass from a realm of death to a realm of life (John 5:24-25; 11:25-26; 1 John 5:12).

One day in the future, Believers "will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4, RSV), the verb *phaneroō* (φανερώω) meaning "to make manifest" (LS).¹²⁵ This speaks of the future glorification of Believers at the resurrection (Romans 8:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18), when the human person is fully restored (Hebrews 9:28), when the Lord "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:21). While experiencing great fulfillment in life on Earth with God's Spirit within Believers, there is a future coming and a definite return of the Messiah to Earth. Colossians 3:1-4 place an emphasis on living the life of the world to come *now*, before it is actually manifest, something which is undeniably important for every person for whom Yeshua the Messiah is the center of life.

Colossians 3:16-17

"psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"

"Let the word of Messiah richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Yeshua, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

Paul instructs the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Colossians 3:16, NRSV).¹²⁶ The "word of Messiah" is likely a reference to either the gospel, or Yeshua's teachings, considered by the TNIV to be "the message of Christ."

There could very easily be a connection intended between Colossians 3:16 and the hymn that Paul used previously in Colossians 1:15-20, detailing what Yeshua has accomplished. Paul says, "Let the message of Christ continue to live in you in all its wealth of wisdom" (Colossians 3:16, Williams New Testament), the clause *en pasē sophia* (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ) or "in all wisdom"

¹²² For further consideration, consult the thoughts expressed in Walter C. Kaiser, "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 14 No. 1 (1971):19-27, with his conclusions also seen in his book *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

¹²³ If necessary, consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

¹²⁴ O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 165.

¹²⁵ LS, 855.

¹²⁶ This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.