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How to Begin

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4).

‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’¹

1 Lewis Carroll, *Through The Looking Glass*, (Macmillan, 1901), page 112.

That famous quotation from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* illustrates one common way to start: define your terms. How will we know what we are talking about if we do not denote precisely, especially if words today are made to 'mean so many different things.' Definitions are critical for clarity. That is particularly true with a subject like holiness because the word 'holiness' can conjure up emotions that are off-putting. It can feel legalistic. Burdensome. Unrealistic. And more.

A good definition of holiness can help us avoid the boil of legalism memorably lanced by the preacher Charles Swindoll:

The problem with legalists is that not enough people have confronted them and told them to get lost. Those are strong words, but I don't mess with legalism anymore. I'm 72 years old; what have I got to lose? Seriously, I used to kowtow to legalists, but they're dangerous. They are grace-killers. They'll drive off every new Christian you bring to church. They are enemies of the faith. Other than that, I don't have any opinion!²

Standard lexicons indicate that the word for holy in the Old Testament (קִדְּשׁ/ qodesh),³ and somewhat similarly the word for holy in the New Testament (ἅγιος/ hagios),⁴ imply that the idea

2 Charles Swindoll, interview with Howard Hendricks, *Veritas*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (October, 2007), page 6.

3 'Apartness, sacredness, holiness,' Gesenius, trans. Robinson, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Oxford, 1962), page 871; 'To be holy, spoken of a man who devotes himself to God, and thus separates himself from the rest of the people...to be sacred...set apart for God,' *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, (Hendrickson, 2007), page 655.

4 Originally 'of the quality possessed by things and persons that could approach a divinity'; 'dedicated to God, holy, sacred'; 'pure, perfect, worthy of God'; 'consecrated to God.' Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (University of Chicago Press, 1957), page 9.

of holiness is akin to ‘separate,’ ‘other,’ ‘different,’ or (as it is most commonly put) ‘set apart.’ Holiness is not about being boring or stuck in the past or overly rigid and legalistic. Holiness is being different, special, reflecting in some small way the otherness of God. The clock of holiness points to the Eternal.

But, important as that clarification is, the trouble with our view of holiness is not so much that we don’t know what holiness *is* as that we don’t know *how to go about attaining it*. Trying to attain holiness the wrong way has been a core challenge throughout the history of the world.⁵ It was the problem of the Pharisees. It is the problem of many corrupt forms of Christianity (though at the other extreme, there may be perversions of religion that care not one whit for holiness). It was the ‘fig leaf’ covering of Adam and Eve,⁶ and it was the essential nature of the problem facing the Colossian Christians too.

The Colossians needed to realize that as they, in Christ, already were ‘holy,’ therefore they were now to live in holy ways, setting their minds and hearts on following the pattern of Christlike living. So Paul tells them that Christ ‘has now reconciled [you] in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him’ (Col. 1:22); and therefore ‘Put on, then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience ...’ (Col. 3:12).

5 See Appendix ‘A Brief History of Holiness.’

6 Genesis 3:7. Adam and Eve’s attempt to cover their nakedness before God was inadequate in a similar way that wrongheaded approaches to cover up our moral nakedness with human generated so-called holiness are inadequate.

Listen to the renowned John Owen's definition. He defined holiness according to how we are to become holy:

Holiness is nothing but the implanting, the writing and realization of the gospel in our own souls...There neither is nor ever was in the world nor ever shall be the least drop of holiness but what flowing from Jesus Christ is communicated by the Spirit according to the truth and promise of the gospel... [Holiness] is the delivery up of our souls into the mold of the doctrine of [the gospel], so as that our minds and the word should answer one another as face doth unto face in water.⁷

John Owen was, in the estimation of many, the greatest theologian that British Christianity has ever produced—though the Venerable Bede or Anselm of Canterbury might disagree with that assessment! At any rate, it is worth paying attention to what Owen has to say. First, holiness is empowered *by* the gospel. Second, holiness is becoming *like* the gospel—‘as face reflects face in water.’

Paul is likewise calling the Colossians towards true holiness by showing them the right way to go about attaining it. He is urging them both to resist religious legalism *and* reclaim the real nature of gospel holiness.

Resist Religious Legalism

Paul gives the Colossian Christians the spiritual antibodies to resist a particularly virulent form of religious legalism. This ‘Colossian heresy’ basically taught that if you followed specific religious rules and ceremonies, and had dramatic mystical experiences, you would become fully holy. The idea of ‘fullness’

7 Owen, John, *Complete Works*, vol. 3, ‘The Holy Spirit,’ (Edinburgh, 1965), pages 370-371, 508.

seems to have been part of the rhetoric the false teachers used to entrap the Colossian Christians. Don't you want to obey fully? Don't you want the full experience? Paul counters this argument by pointing out the fullness Christians already have in Christ and so therefore we are to pursue only in Christ.⁸ We do not know how the false teachers themselves would have described their message, but we do know Paul's devastating critique which is mainly found in chapter 2 of his letter to the Colossians.⁹

In Colossians 2:8, Paul says that the Colossian Christians must resist those who are trying to 'take you captive by philosophy and empty deceit.' The reference to 'philosophy' may indicate a Greco-Roman pagan philosophical influence, or just a cleverly deceptive yet vacuous theory. That the false teaching was 'according to human tradition' may mean commonly accepted but corrupt human ideas passed down to us, or a more specific form of that tradition in a religious form.¹⁰ The false teaching was also 'according to the elemental spirits of the world.' What exactly these 'elemental spirits' were

8 Colossians 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9; 4:12.

9 If you want to follow the long-running technical debate about the Colossian heresy, you can read up on it in the various commentaries. For instance, F.F. Bruce *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1984); John Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians* (Baker, 1974); J.B. Lightfoot, *Colossians & Philemon*, (Macmillan, 1886); R.C. Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon* (IVP, 1984); Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Books, 1982); A.S. Peake, *Colossians* (Eerdmans, 1956); G.H. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge University Press, 1967); Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians* (Zondervan, 1996); John Woodhouse, *Colossians & Philemon* (Christian Focus, 2011).

10 The two go together: human religious tradition tends to reflect in religious form the ideas that humans typically embrace anyway.

that Paul refers to is disputed, but they were probably part and parcel of the mystical emphasis of the false teaching. And, Paul says, the false teaching was ‘not according to Christ.’ *According* to tradition. *According* to mysticism. But *not according* to Christ.

Then in Colossians 2:16, Paul says that the Colossian Christians must resist being judged for not following the false teachers’ religious rules and sacred days: ‘let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.’ The Colossians were to resist being disqualified, or rejected, by the false teachers’ exclusive religious club, if they did not ascribe to the false teachers’ asceticism and mysticism, verse 18, ‘Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels.’ Asceticism urges severe abstinence, for instance from necessary food or legitimate pleasures. The ‘worship of angels’ is another puzzle piece in the Colossian heresy, suggesting that the false teachers viewed angels as worthy of adoration like some kind of superhero demigod.¹¹ The consequence of all this false teaching, if not resisted, was a submissive bondage to legalism. Why, Paul asks in verse 20, ‘do you submit to regulations—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”...according to human precepts and teachings?’

11 It’s interesting to compare how this text reads in different parts of the world today. For instance, the Africa Study Bible notes that, ‘Some people live under the spiritual powers of this world. They are careful to avoid taboos and add extra special rules to Christian teaching, often from traditional African beliefs. Some believe the act of fasting will make them right in God’s sight. Others try to understand angelic hierarchies and spiritual territories. But self-denial or special knowledge cannot change our sinful hearts or make us acceptable in God’s sight’ (*Africa Study Bible*, ed. John Susu, (Oasis International Limited, 2012), page 1751.

Finally, in Colossians 2:23 Paul summarizes the false teaching as having ‘an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.’ It was a human designed religion, a ritualistic, legalistic, mysticism—and what is more, *it was useless*, it was ‘of no value’! Not only was this false teaching wrong, *because* it was wrong it was practically ineffective. It would not make you more holy. Therefore, Paul is saying, resist religious legalism.

Reclaim the Real Nature of Gospel Holiness

But the Colossians must not only resist religious legalism, they must also reclaim the real nature of gospel holiness. To do that, they needed a much more exalted vision of who Jesus Christ is. As Paul famously put it in Colossians 1:15-20:

He [that is Christ] is the image of the invisible God... by him all things were created... he is before all things, and in him all things hold together... in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things... making peace by the blood of his cross.

Paul is saying *this* is who Christ is. Christ is not merely a philosophy. He is not simply a set of good ideas. He is not only a teacher. He is not one among other spiritual heroes. He is far more than any of that. He is the image of the invisible God. He is before all things. In Him all the fullness of God Himself dwells. *This* is who Christ is. And therefore *because* this is who Christ is, Paul can persuasively exhort the Colossians to allow ‘no one to delude you with plausible arguments,’ with this false teaching about holiness (Col. 2:4).

What then is the right way to become more holy? The key principle is expressed in Colossians 2:6. Paul says, 'As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.' In other words, the way *on* is the way *in*. The way on to become more like Christ is the way in to receive Christ. Paul is not suggesting we do not need to try to be holy; in fact, active progress must be made: 'walk in him.' Holiness, as we will see, takes effort like a walk requires the sometimes strenuous exercise of putting one foot in front of the other. But the way of holiness is not according to philosophy, human tradition, or the mystical worship of angels; it is according to Christ; it is a walk 'in him.' Holiness is an active following of the same gospel pattern 'as you received Christ the Lord,' or as when you first became a Christian.

Begin Here

So when Paul explains how practically to become more holy, he begins where we must begin: initial, real, resurrected, spiritual life. As he puts it in Colossians 3:1, 'If then you have been raised with Christ...' By saying, 'if you have been raised with Christ,' Paul is not suggesting he has doubt in his own mind as to whether the Colossians really were Christians. He is assuming that they are. We might express it like this: 'since you have been raised with Christ' or even 'because you have been raised with Christ.' Paul is making a logical argument: *if* that is true (which it is) *therefore* this makes sense. *If* you have been raised with Christ (which you have) *therefore* this is the right way to become more holy.

A Christian is already 'raised with Christ.' We have been raised spiritually by the resurrection power of Christ at work within us. That spiritual resurrection that has already occurred means that our coming future physical resurrection is guaranteed. But now,

in the meantime, we already are spiritually raised with Christ. It is this initial, real, resurrected, spiritual life that is the *sine qua non*, the indispensable, essential, starting requirement of all real gospel holiness. You must begin here.

Without already existing spiritual life, any attempt to become holy is pointless. Worse than pointless, it can actually end up doing profound damage. It can give you the impression that you have attained some degree of holiness when in reality nothing of the sort has happened. You are merely papering over the cracks, whitewashing the tomb, covering up the spiritual decay with religious ointment. Even Jerry Bridges, who often underlined the hard work that personal holiness requires, emphasizes, ‘The pursuit of holiness must be anchored in the grace of God; otherwise it is doomed to failure.’¹²

The Biblical emphasis here is brilliantly and poetically expressed in Augustine’s *Confessions*:

You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace that is yours.¹³

Or as Augustine put it more aphoristically: ‘Grant what you command and command what you will.’¹⁴

When we are confused about holiness the primary reason is often that we misunderstand its necessary starting point. For us

12 Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, (NavPress, 2006), page 2.

13 Augustine, *Confessions*, (OUP, 1991, trans. Henry Chadwick), X.xxvii, page 201.

14 *Ibid.* X.xxix, page 202.

to please God and be more like God, more like Christ, we need to be first *raised with Christ*. So, let me ask you: have you been raised with Christ?

Consider the case of someone who grew up in a Christian home. He went to church from when he was just a baby. And yet, he began to realize that while he understood a lot about the Christian religion, he did not know what it meant to be, as Paul puts it, ‘raised with Christ.’ For this person it was all about doing the right thing, saying the right thing, and that was a burden he did not want to live with anymore, much less attempt to try even harder, or become holy as he thought was the definition of holiness in his own way of thinking—more effort, more rules, more religion. But he soon realized he had it the wrong way around when he came across some real Christians. He began to realize he had been trying to raise himself up when really he needed to trust in Jesus so that he could be ‘raised with Christ.’

This ‘being raised’ is something that happens *to* you. It is something you receive. Yes, it’s something you ask for—as Jesus taught, ask and you will receive (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9-13)—but you cannot achieve it by your own force of will, effort or endeavor. It all starts with being raised with Christ, in the power of His resurrection, by the power of His Spirit.

*‘Tis thine to cleanse the heart
To sanctify the soul,
To pour fresh life in every part
And new create the whole.¹⁵*

Ask Christ now to raise you up, make you new, give you a spiritual, resurrection-empowered, life in Him. Trust Him.

15 Isaac Watts, ‘Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove’ (1707).

Give your life to Him. Believe Him. As J.C. Ryle, the well-known evangelical Anglican Bishop and author of a renowned book on holiness called simply *Holiness*, said, ‘In walking with God, a man will go just as far as he believes, and no further.’¹⁶ Without clarifying that holiness begins with us being raised with Christ, we will tend to emphasize, as Oliver O’Donovan put it in his seminal work *Resurrection and Moral Order*, ‘man taking responsibility for himself...without the good news that God has taken responsibility for him.’¹⁷

Christians are to Seek

With this initial requirement—real spiritual life—in place, we now can be called to take the first practical step towards personal holiness: *seek*. Paul says, ‘If then you have been raised with Christ, seek...’ We tend to say that someone is a seeker if they are not yet a Christian (so a seeker-sensitive church usually means a church that thinks of itself as sensitive to the need to reach non-Christians). But Paul here is saying that *Christians* are to be seekers! Since we have been raised with Christ, now we are to seek; since we have new spiritual life, now we *can* seek. We are to use our regenerate will to make an effort, strenuously work, make a conscious choice, seek to be holy.

We have so often heard the evangelistic message that we need only to believe to be saved, that we have forgotten the holiness message that the saved must seek. But as J.C. Ryle said, ‘It is thoroughly Scriptural and right to say “faith alone justifies.” But it is not equally Scriptural and right to say “faith alone

16 J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, (1879), Chapter 8, Section 4, ‘Moses.’

17 Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, (Eerdmans, 1994), page 12.

sanctifies.”¹⁸ Justification *is* by faith alone; sanctification *is not* by faith alone. We must seek, or make a conscious determination and effort. Becoming more holy requires the personal exertion of the Christian’s regenerate will, actively seeking.

Most Christians are about as holy as they want to be. Jerry Bridges explains, ‘Though the power for godly character comes from Christ, the responsibility for developing and displaying that character is ours.’¹⁹ Christians have the power *and* the responsibility to become more holy. When you are not yet saved you cannot be holy. When you are saved now you can be holy. (And one day in heaven you will not be able to be unholy!)

A Christian, ‘raised with Christ’ yet still in this world, faces a battle. And the first step to winning that battle is to realize that you are in one. Meaning you must make a determination, an act of your will, to ‘seek.’ The great Christian leader and abolitionist William Wilberforce once said, ‘No one expects to attain to the height of learning, or arts, or power...without vigorous resolution, strenuous diligence, and steady perseverance. Yet, we expect to be Christian without labor, study or inquiry.’²⁰ Sometimes we avoid talking about the hard work that holiness requires. Perhaps we think emphasizing the effort needed to become more holy will only put people off coming to church. We want to place the cookies on the lowest possible shelf, make Christianity like the easy button. But anything that has any value requires discipline and hard work to attain. If you want to do well at school, you must study hard. If you are going to appear

18 J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, (1879), Section 1, ‘Introduction.’

19 Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, (NavPress, 2008), page 55.

20 William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians*, (Dublin, 1797), page 11.

in the city orchestra, you will need to practice your violin. If you want to perform well in the office, it will take commitment. If you want your children to do well, it requires the effort to train them.

Before you became a Christian, you did not have the spiritual power to 'seek' to become more holy. Once you are raised with Christ, now you have that spiritual power. So Paul instructs us to exercise our regenerate, born-again will and seek. Put in the effort. Work hard at it. *Seek*: you are being called to do so from God's Word. But what are we to seek?

Seek the Reign of Jesus

Paul writes, '...seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.' Paul here is probably using language drawn from the well-known Old Testament Psalm 110. That Psalm describes prophetically the victory that the Messiah will win. It is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. Psalm 110:1 says 'The Lord says to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand..."' Paul takes those phrases of sitting at the right hand of God to describe now the victory that Jesus won when He died, rose again, and then ascended to be with God. Christ is 'seated' at the right hand of God. He has won the victory, predicted and prophesied in Psalm 110. When Paul tells us to 'seek the things that are above,' he makes sure we understand that this 'above' place is 'where *Christ* is, seated at the right hand of God.'

To seek 'the things that are above,' then, does not mean some sort of vague looking forward to heaven after we die. It does not mean an undefined unrealistically pious way of life while on earth. To 'seek the things above' is specifically to seek Christ to rule in practice increasingly in our lives. To have the victory that He has won more and more a personal reality day by day.

Becoming more holy is essentially to seek the rule of Christ's kingdom in this world in our daily lives. But *how* are we to seek the reign of Jesus?

Your Mindset

Paul tells us how in verse 2, 'Set your *minds* on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.' We seek the reign of Jesus in our daily lives by the way we 'set our minds,' by how we actively shape our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes—our whole worldview, or mindset. Holiness, then, is (rightly understood) a battle of the *mind*. It is an outworking of our true internal worldview. It is a reflection of our mindset, what we think, feel, and the attitude of our hearts. We tend to think of 'mind' as meaning something only intellectual. But Paul is writing to a recently planted church in the ancient city of Colossae, and he, of course, is not meaning by 'mind' our modern idea of IQ or school grades. He was not referring to twenty-first-century intellectual status, or mere mental assent to an idea. The 'mind' is a person's total internal approach, a *mindset* that is to shape not only schoolwork, but also homelife, work life, everyday life.

This mindset must be focused on the 'things that are above, and not on the things that are on earth.' We have already seen that the 'things that are above' refer to the reign of Christ. But what does Paul mean by 'the things that are on earth'? His definition is in verse 5: 'Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.' So the 'things that are on *earth*' (verse 2), or when he writes about 'what is *earthly* in you' (verse 5a), are 'sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry' (verse 5b).

When Paul adds ‘which is idolatry,’ he could be saying that all of this earthliness is idolatry. He could be saying that when our mindset is focused on this earth—‘earth’ as defined in verse 5—it is a sign that we have a worship problem. Or, Paul could be saying that covetousness in particular is idolatry. In either case, when Paul talks about the ‘things of this earth’ he is not advocating an unrealistic approach to life on this earth. Paul nowhere teaches that we are not to think about how to care for our family, how to have a good career or how to do well at school, how to be an economist or a banker or a baker, or a mom or a dad. No, by using this spatial imagery of the ‘earth’ below (as opposed to the things that are ‘above’), Paul means things that are counter to the reign of Christ. Paul is saying that the way to be holy, to grow spiritually, is to fill our minds with what is in accord with Christ’s rule rather than what is antagonistic to His rule.

This is *not* to say that merely growing in our intellectual attainment of Christian knowledge is enough. In fact, some of the most unholy people I have ever met knew quite a lot about the Bible. But that ‘knowledge’ had never really penetrated to shift the way they actually looked at life. We tend to say this is because what they knew in their ‘head’ had not penetrated to their ‘heart.’ But apart from being a slightly dubious biblical anthropology—a topic for a different book²¹—it disguises what is really going on. The person who acts in contradistinction

21 In biblical terms—I would argue this is fairly consistent across Scripture—the ‘heart’ is not the place of our emotions. The ‘heart’ is where we think, feel, and make decisions. It is the core of who we are. As one Scripture reference puts it: ‘The fool says in his *heart*...’ (Ps. 14:1, emphasis added). The heart is where the fool thinks, self-talks, and because of that formulates a philosophy of life.

to what he knows, does not really know it. Jonathan Edwards was at his most brilliant in this area: in what sense, Edwards would argue, does a man really know honey if he has not tasted honey? The knowledge we are talking about is one that is deeply transformative because it is genuinely experienced. The Puritans used to call it 'experimental' knowledge.

I remember one very educated man who was briefly a colleague. We had worked together on an academic course for a little while. He was an elite level professor at a city university. After we had toiled away on this project for a couple of weeks, he invited me and some friends around to show us generous hospitality. We were grateful, and we were looking forward to going with him to see his house and be with him. On the drive (it was a long distance away), he described extensively all of the effort he was putting into building his McMansion. He had yet another addition he was constructing, a swimming pool he would build, a unique design style for the aesthetics to reflect his own personality, all this and more for his perfect domestic dream. Clearly, this was where his 'mind' was 'set' and focused. After he had told us all the expense and hard work and time, I just asked him one question. What will you do when you have completed it? And to that, he had absolutely no answer.

It is easy, isn't it, for our minds to become focused on covetousness, which is really a form of idolatry? The things of this earth seem so intoxicating because they seem reasonable. Is it not better to have more? Why should I not have this experience or that sensual delight? Surely it makes rational sense to get what you can while you can.

To all this, the answer is thinking right. Listen again to the famous words of Jim Elliot: 'He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.'

Holiness is a battle of the mind. It is not foolish to be holy; it is wise. The solution to the siren call of earthliness is thinking accurately or rightly. The solution to covetousness is to know you are not losing out when you pursue holiness.

Holiness, the battle for holiness, starts with the mind, which means that being holy is the rational and logical thing to be. Holiness is not some masochistic, mystical nonsense. Holiness is the life that you were designed to live, what humans are meant to be. Holiness is what makes sanctified common sense, and this is why the first step in holiness is to start to put our minds back in order. If our minds are set upon being wealthy, well, what will we do when we have all that wealth?

Play golf? What then?

More golf? What then?

If our mind is set on experiencing as much sexual satisfaction as we can, what will we do when we get that? One of the strangest, if not all that surprising, truths is that there is evidence of erectile dysfunction increasing in proportion to the prominence of pornography.²² If you ate nothing but ice cream all day, all year, soon enough, you would vomit. The founder of *Playboy Magazine* pretended to be living a life of his wildest dreams, but actually, it is reported, experienced profound sexual

22 'Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports,' *Behav. Sci.* (2016, 6, [3], 17; accessed April 16, 2021), <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/6/3/17/htm>, 'Is Pornography Use Associated with Sexual Difficulties and Dysfunctions among Younger Heterosexual Men?' Aleksandar Stulhofer and Ivan Landripet, *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, [https://www.jsm.jsexmed.org/article/S1743-6095\(15\)31021-3/fulltext](https://www.jsm.jsexmed.org/article/S1743-6095(15)31021-3/fulltext) (26 March 2016; accessed April 16, 2021).

dissatisfaction.²³ There is even a demonstratable link between porn and human trafficking; when you watch porn you could be watching a coercive sex act, and by your viewership be supporting sex slavery.²⁴

Paul is saying *think* about it: trace out the results of your choices and your decisions. Trace out the consequences of those earthly things, and, instead, focus on the things that are above and think about them; set your mind on them.

In many ways, the best argument for the sweetness of holiness is to meet a holy man or a holy woman. Find one. Spend time with him or her. Let the sweetness of their life logically commend to you pleasing Jesus.

I won't give away the names for the sake of avoiding embarrassing the people involved. Some time ago, a famous visiting preacher came to College Church and told me afterward of a certain 'very godly man' who had said something to him. I wondered whom he meant. When an individual came up to me later and told me that he'd said that certain something to this visiting preacher, I was amused that really, I should have guessed it was he—this 'very godly man'—who spoke to our guest. When you meet a holy man or woman you find that you are perceptibly drawn to the sweetness of that holiness.

23 See <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/december/hugh-hefners-hollow-victory.html> (accessed April 8, 2021); also, <http://www.breakpoint.org/2017/10/tale-two-playboys-divergent-paths-hugh-hefner-augustine-hippo/> (accessed April 8, 2021) where Hugh Hefner is said to have admitted in his later years, 'I've spent so much of my life looking for love in all the wrong places.'

24 <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/08/porn-human-trafficking-reinforce-each-other/> (accessed April 16, 2021).

Set your minds on pleasing Jesus. There is a sweetness to it. There's a joy to it. There's a freedom to it. The great problem of living a lie is that at some point or another, you are going to forget what you said to whom. It is so much less confusing to live a life of integrity. Fill your mind with the truth about Jesus. That is why I encourage good reading whenever I can. Get some books off your church bookstall or from a library or from an online store or an eBook—and read them. This is why we preach, why we train adults and children, why we have small groups around God's Word. The health and holiness of a church and an individual are inextricably correlated to what we *think* about. When we think about Jesus and have our mind filled with the truth of Jesus, we will realize that pleasing Jesus is what makes the most sense.

In other words, Paul is saying that one of the primary causes of a Christian sinning is that they are not thinking. They need to come to their senses and have their minds focused on the things that are above, on the reign of Jesus, and then they will grow spiritually. This is why we encourage one another to have a quiet time, have a devotional. This is why I spent years writing a daily devotional for people, fresh material every day explaining the whole Bible chapter by chapter, book by book. We need to be in God's Word, having our minds shaped by Truth. For out of it comes fresh new life, spiritual vitality, a focus upon the things that are above, the hope and love and joy and peace and all that Christ is and all we are in Christ, as we are raised with Christ, so we seek, an act of will, and fill our minds with the truth and with what pleases Jesus.

The Motivation for Holiness

Well, you say that is all very well and I understand a bit more of *how* it happens: first raised with Christ, or born again, a real Christian; then seek or an act of will; and then set my mind on what pleases Jesus. Yes, I can see how, but I still don't feel very motivated. I have the *how*, but I don't yet have a *why*. Why should I be holy?

Paul concludes this first section on holiness by giving them the motivation in verses 3 and 4. He writes: 'For' [that is, this is why] 'For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.'

One motivation to be holy is *who we are* as Christians. Martin Lloyd-Jones put it like this: 'The New Testament method and way of sanctification is to get us to realise our position and standing, and to act accordingly. In other words, "Be what you are."²⁵ At root, at its most basic level, the motivation for holiness is a matter of identity. Who are you? If you are a Christian, Paul says, you have died; that is, by accepting Jesus as your Lord, you have died to the selfish self with all its foolish desires only to want what you want. You've died to that selfish self, and you've re-centered your life around God, around Christ. You've put to death the self in rebellion against God. That's what it means to be raised with Christ. First, you die to running your life your own way. That is what it means to be a Christian. It is who you are if you are a Christian. You have died to the selfish self. You have died. Who am I? In a certain sense, 'I'—myself—has died.

25 From @mljquotes, Twitter, June 8, 2021. Original citation from Iain H. Murray, *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace*, (Banner of Truth, 2008), page 222.

I am no longer on a journey to discover myself, please myself, approve of myself, and do what I like and what I want. All that has died, for Jesus is now my Lord.

But is that it? Is that all that a Christian is? No, not at all. ‘You have died,’ Paul says, ‘and your life is hidden with Christ in God.’ What a beautiful, enigmatic phrase, but what does it mean? It means that you—who you really are—is not yet fully revealed. This is how eighteenth-century commentator Matthew Henry described it:

Our true life lies in the other world: You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. The new man has its livelihood thence. It is born and nourished from above; and the perfection of its life is reserved for that state. It is hid with Christ; not hid from us only, in point of secrecy, but hid for us, denoting security.²⁶

As you read this chapter, bring to your mind’s eye the people in your local church. What do you see? When you look around you see this gangly, immature, teenager; or this older, wrinkled, woman; or this middle-aged man with his ill-fitting clothes; or this person with this unimpressive job, or that person with that struggling career. What do you see? There’s a certain sense in which you only see the surface. The true spiritual reality is still hidden from your eyes.

There is the spiritual giant who is on his knees each night for your soul to fight through that depression that you experience. Do you see that? No. But God does.

26 Matthew Henry, *Commentary on Whole Bible*, Colossians 3:3. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/colossians/3.html> Last accessed January 2022.

There is a person who seems to have life so easy, to be so successful. Yet, battles with critics and unfair accusers and learning to forgive them every single day. We may not see that. But God does.

There's the person who visits the aged and the infirmed. Do you see that? No. But God does.

There is the person who quietly gives her widow's mite into the offering plate when no one else is looking, and it is all she has to live on. Do you see that? No, but Jesus does.

There's the person who lives on only a fraction of his salary to support the work of the kingdom of God through the church. Do you see that? No. But God does.

So much of the spiritual reality of the Christian is still hidden, and therefore it is secure. When you are attacked or unfairly accused, when you are beaten down, there is a part of you—the real part of you—that no one can touch and no one can take away from you, for who you are is hidden with Christ in God. No abuser, no rapist, no bully, no murderer, no liar, no deceiver, no slanderer can take away who you are, because you are in Christ, hidden with Christ in God.

Christian, understand who you are. You are a child of God. You are an heir of the treasures of all that Christ has won in glory.

Colossians 3:4 reads, 'When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.' What an extraordinary statement!

Who am I? Christ is my life. 'When Christ who *is your life*;' think of it: *Christ* is my life! The Christian is not on a voyage of self-discovery. The Christian is on a journey of becoming more like Christ. Our task is not to discover who we are. It is to become who we were made to be. Who are you? Look to Christ.

That's who you are. Who should you be? Look to Christ. That is who you are to aim to be. *Christ is your life.*

What does that mean? Not that your individual personality is unimportant. It means that your personality becomes as it is meant to be, as you, yourself in Christ, become more like Christ. Your task is not to discover who you are, but to become who Christ made you to be. And one day, one glorious day, then you also will appear with Him in glory; not yet, then.

There's much about the Christian life now that is not glorious. We are in an arduous battle for holiness that we wage by our regenerate will, seeking to do what pleases Jesus and setting our minds on what pleases Jesus, reasoning that holiness is what makes sense. It is what is logical and truly the way we are made to live.

And Paul, therefore, gives the motivation for it all. 'For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.' What an astonishing thought! The Christian, the one raised with Christ, dies to self, rises to new life, and then when Christ returns, will share in the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You say, 'Well, why be holy?' Because of who you are. You are Christ's. You share His life. You have this future glory to come. You are made to be this person of Christlikeness, for you are already in Christ, and your life is hid with Christ in God and you will appear with Him in glory.

Will you take a moment now to consider this? Perhaps you have not been raised with Christ. Oh, you've been to church. You know the rules, but you don't know the Ruler. Would you ask Christ to raise you up to give you new life? Pause right now and call on Christ to give you Resurrection life.

EVERYDAY HOLINESS

Perhaps you are a Christian, and yet, if you are being honest, you've been very passive about your holiness, your spiritual growth. And here comes God's Word and tells you to seek the things that are above. Would you make a fresh commitment to seek the reign of Jesus practically in your daily life? Write down a specific and tangible way that you can seek the reign of Jesus.

Perhaps your mind is all over the place, confused, and in a jumble. Would you ask God to help you to put your mind back into order, to have a mind that is set on Christ?

PRAYER

O Lord God, we thank you that, if we have been raised with Christ, our life is hid with Christ in God. We are yours. This is who we are.

And Lord, as we go out into this world around us, where there are countless opportunities to be distracted, innumerable videos, apps and all this media that bombard us all the time with different messages about who we are, would you help us to remember this moment, this word, of who we are as our lives are hid with Christ in God? We will appear with Him in glory. And to live life that way. To live our lives that way. To live my life that way. Lord, would you by your Spirit give us that power to do so, we pray. Would you help us to seek the things that are above? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.