

COLOSSIANS – CHAPTER THREE

We have used the image of wealth representing our spiritual riches in Christ to illustrate the theme of chapter one, how to learn to draw on our riches in heaven through a knowledge of Jesus Christ whom we draw on by faith leading us back to seek more knowledge of Him and at the same time to spend our riches in living a Christ-filled life. One word more than any other sums up what that life looks like in practice, God's kind of love which He gives limitlessly and unconditionally. So Paul says the heart of Christian ministry should be to build people up in the realisation of how rich we are when Jesus Christ lives inside us.

Chapter two can therefore be looked upon as a warning about how we are so easily robbed of our riches in Christ. It alternates between warning us of spiritual burglars and their mode of operation and explaining how to be protected from this happening, how to have a spiritual security system.

Paul begins the chapter with encouragement to know how rich we are if Christ lives in us, how if we draw by faith on this treasure we will enjoy a strength and a love for each other which means we can handle the smartest robber.(2:1-3)

He then gives us the first of three warnings, each of which conveniently begins with the letter D. We can be deluded(2:4) by persuasive argument. The word 'delude' is the Greek word 'paralogizomai' which literally means to reason wrongly or miscalculate. Wrong reasoning begins with wrong information. The protection, the security system, which prevents us being deluded by clever argument is good discipline and stable faith.(2:5) Discipline is about being in a learning relationship with God, and faith, as we have seen, is the PIN which allows to draw on what we have been given in Christ. It is simply about continuing our Christian lives in the way we began. Faith in all that Christ is allows us to be rooted in heaven and free to walk the earth.(2:6,7)

The second warning against spiritual burglars is to prevent us being deceived and so imprisoned by the philosophy and tradition of men.(2:8) This time the Greek word is 'apate' which literally means to cheat or to fool. The security system this time depends on being aware that all of God was in Christ, and all of Christ is in us. There is nothing worthwhile outside of God's view of the world however impressive it may sound.(2:9,10) Circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament both picture the old life cut off and a new life, His life, which we enjoy instead. This means that the debt of sin is paid in full at the cross and the claims of human authorities to dictate our thinking and our lives have been cancelled out.(2:11-15) Why go back to letting them do so?

The third warning is about the spiritual robbers who want to defraud us.(2:18) The Greek word this time is 'katabrabeuo' which means to give judgement against because the judge is corrupt. The weapons they use are laws about food and drink, or about special days to be observed on the one hand,(2:16,17) or a false spirituality involving experiences or visions on the other.(2:18,19) Demands to perform by keeping rules or by mysticism miss the point that such things in the Old Testament were only a shadow of Jesus. Now we have the living Christ we do not need to play with shadows. He alone is to be our head. No man however clever is to take the

Lord's place in our lives. Such people appear to offer blessing from God but are robbers who cannot deliver because what they teach does not work.(2:20-23)

Chapter three could be subtitled 'How the rich (in Christ) live.' Let us first divide it into sections. My suggestions are verses 1-4; 5-11; 12-17; 18-25. You can choose your own. Again I suggest you give each section a title which sums up its message.

SECTION ONE – 3:1-4

Q.1 How in the light of the last two chapters are we to think about God and the world in which we live? What two facts about Jesus are to dominate our outlook in life? What future event will one day show us we were on the right track as Christians despite all the misleading teaching which is around us?

SECTION TWO – 3:5-11

Q.2 What two pictures does Paul use to illustrate what in practical terms we will do because of our faith in Christ? He gives two lists in verses 5 and 8,9 which describe our old behaviour. Write them down item by item and let God speak to your heart as to whether any still describe you today. What is the difference between the two lists?

Q.3 What picture does Paul now use to describe the behaviour which will take the place of the old life? What is the secret of being able to make this exchange? For what kind of people will this exchange work?

SECTION THREE – 3:12-17

Q.4 Where does the new life in Christ begin to be different from the old? Again write out the list and reflect one by one on each item letting God show you whether He has as yet been allowed to be this in your life. How would such behaviour change any human relationship?

Q.5 In verses 15-17 Paul gives three simple secrets which cause this exchange of the old for the new to be a reality. Put each one into your own words. What attitude is common to all three? What special place does Christian music and teaching have in bringing about this exchange?

SECTION FOUR - 3:18-25

Q.6 What five relationships are now considered as examples of how these secrets will work out in practice? What is required of wives and husbands? With such attitudes would it still be possible to have marriage problems?

Q.7 What is expected of children and fathers? How would such attitudes solve modern family problems?

Q.8 What difference will the exchanged life make to a slave, or an employee? Again consider how this attitude would change the work place? What are we to do if we find we cannot fulfil what is required in any of these 5 relationships?