

Colossians 3.¹⁻⁴

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. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ... (niv).

As we have discussed in previous meditations, Lent is a time of renunciation. More than the slightly inconvenient and short-term renunciation through self-denial, the deeper meaning of renunciation looks for long-term, even permanent and often painful self-denial. During lent we mortify the flesh, examine our priorities, and, where necessary, realign our priorities with those of Jesus and with the purposes of God. During Lent, we seek the transformation of our being into new creatures, born of God not of man. Paul's admonition that we stay aloof from "earthly things" but set our hearts and minds upon "things above" is about more than personal improvement regimens that strive for a kind of enlightened Stoic self-mastery. Immediately preceding today's reading, Paul warned concerning that which was "indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship."

"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not, which all are to perish with the using), after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."¹

So, if Paul isn't simply looking for us to discipline and remake ourselves, what is he looking for? It is important to note, consider, and ponder upon Paul's reasons for our rejection of "earthly things" in favor of "things above." We set our affections on "things above" not because we have disciplined ourselves but "since [or because we] have been raised with Christ." On the other hand, we are to remain aloof from "worldly things" "for [or because we] died, and [our] life is now hidden with Christ in God." As far as Paul is concerned, it is not enough for one to engage in daily strategies and programs of self-mastery. Why?

First, being of human invention and utilizing human will power, self-improvement plans can only create a better human. Second, being of human invention and utilizing human will power self-improvement plans are rarely lasting. Paul's vision sees something more than a thoroughly disciplined human self-made in the image of the very best of human beings. In his vision, he sees God. At work. Personally. Creating. Creating beings that are more than human. Beings made in His image, as he originally intended. So, Lent is a good time to ask ourselves these three famous question:

"And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God?
Have ye received his image in your countenances?
Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?"²

¹ Colossians 2.²⁰⁻²³

² Alma 5.¹⁴

This, actually, is what Paul is talking about in today's passage. Go ahead. It's Lent. "Mortify" your flesh. Paul is O.K. with that. Smear ash on your forehead. Dress in sackcloth and ashes. Fast. Deny yourself of pleasures—good and bad. But know this, it is all preamble. A trifle of preparation. The real work of transformation and creation and rebirth will be done by God through Christ Jesus. So during Lent, let's not forget to pray. Let's pray to be born again, permanently transformed, created in the image of God. This rebirth is the gate, not only to being a better person; not only to becoming born of God and being created in his image, but to the very Celestial glory of God for which we all yearn.

"Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God."³

Yes, the Lent Season looks particularly to our being born again, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."⁴ This is how we thoroughly, permanently, eternally come to have our hearts and minds set on "things above" rather than on "earthly things." Lent is not the time to settle for something less, something more man-made, something less divine. Let's let the principles found in Lent take us all the way so that God's image truly is found in our very countenance.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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³ Mosiah 27.²⁵⁻²⁶

⁴ John 1.¹³

