

*Colossians 3:1-4*

## PREFACE

**Turn to Colossians 2:20.**

In our last session, Paul expressed his frustration over the behavior of the Colossians. If he had been there speaking in person, I can imagine him crying out to them in a loud voice,

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (Colossians 2:20-21)

And he extended that list to include their dabbling in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, All of which are worthless "against fleshly indulgence."

I then extended that frustration, applying it to our struggles against the sin nature, posing two questions:

- Why do we still pay homage to our old sin nature, when, in Christ, we are dead to that nature?
- Why do we give it such respect, when it no longer holds power over us?

I wisely (or perhaps cowardly) did not volunteer any answers to those questions, which would logically culminate in, *What should we do about it?* Well, Paul answers that for us in Chapter Three. In some of the most eloquent language found in this letter, Paul tells us how to get our minds right—how to quit paying attention to worthless rules and regulations; worthless dogma; worthless, self-centered piety, fake humility, and fake holiness. Chapter Three—especially the first seventeen verses—makes a pretty good handbook for living a life "according to Christ" (v2:8).

What the false teachers in Colossae were promoting was a *self*-centric life; the apostle declares in Chapter Three that the answer to this is to live a *Christ*-centric life. Or put another way, most of Chapter Two warns us about the *dark* side, while Chapter Three encourages us toward the side of *light*.

**Read Colossians 3:1-4.**

## v1

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ,*  
Again implied, "—and you certainly have—".

**Read Colossians 2:11-13.**

There is a tension in Colossians, fueling debate between interpreters. Because Paul in his other writings emphasizes our "being raised"—i.e., resurrected bodily—in the future, some question the authenticity of the writing in Colossians that speaks of being "raised up" right now. Without belaboring the point (we could spend a session or two on just this), Chapter Three of Colossians makes a strong argument for the believer's privilege of sharing in the *power* of Christ's resurrection in the here and now, for Paul here encourages us to do things that are simply not possible outside of Christ, outside the unique advantage we have in Him. And among these are that we are to "seek" and "set [our] mind[s] on things above."

*keep seeking the things above*

The NASB explicitly reveals the tense of the verb: "**keep seeking** the things above." That's the idea; we are never to stop seeking the things above.

**seek, seeking, set...heart**<sup>niv</sup> = *zeteo* = of uncertain affinity; to seek (literal or figurative); **specially (by Hebrew) to worship (God)**, or (in a bad sense) to plot (against life) :- be (go) about, desire, endeavour, enquire (for), require, (x will) seek (after, for, means). Compare <G4441> (punthanomai).

Once again the NIV, with "set your hearts on," is the least literal, but does express the essence of the statement.

**Read Matthew 6:19-21.**

We "seek" those things dear to our heart. Wherever our treasure is, that is where we want to be. *Temporally*, for most of us, our treasure is stored in home and family, so that is where we want to be; *spiritually* our treasure is stored above, so that is where we want to be in our spirit, in our heart.

And what is our ultimate treasure?

*...where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

For every believer—everyone "raised up with Christ"—that treasure is Christ Himself. And here is reference not just to Christ's present *location*, but to His *sufficiency*.

**Read Hebrews 10:11-14.**

**Read Hebrews 1:3.**

Paul says, *You want to talk to me about aeons, and vague spiritual beings floating about the heavenlies? Let me tell you about the One who sits eternally within arm's reach of God the Father.*

**v2**

And then Paul underscores this in v2 by saying something similar, but not identical.

**Read v2.**

**set your mind(s), Set your affection**<sup>kjv</sup> = *phroneo* = from <G5424> (phren); **to exercise the mind**, i.e. entertain or have a sentiment or opinion; by implication **to be (mentally) disposed** (more or less earnestly in a certain direction); intensive **to interest oneself in** (with concern or obedience) :- set the affection on, (be) care (-ful), (be like-, + be of one, + be of the same, + let this) mind (-ed), regard, savour, think; **to have understanding**.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to **live in harmony** in the Lord. (Philippians 4:2)

**Have this attitude** in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:5)

So what is he saying here in these first two verses?

**First**, as one who has “been raised up with Christ,” we are to seek *Him*: everything Christ is, everything He represents, everything He teaches, every high desire He has for our life. Things of this earth should not be our ultimate aspiration; the things of earth should be nothing more or less than a launchpad to heavenly things.

This means that our life here on earth is not for us just a holding pattern, where we impatiently bide our time waiting for heaven. God has placed all around us things and people that point us toward Him. *There* is our earthly joy—finding God all around us, using His creation as an illustration of His beauty, His generosity, His grace and mercy. We “seek the things above” when we recognize Christ in our everyday lives:

- In the evening sunset we see His splendor.
- In the laughter of children and grandchildren we see His joy; in their lives we see His bountiful, immeasurable gifts to us.
- In the natural creation we see His careful, meticulous devotion to not just our spiritual existence, but our physical existence while on earth.

Remember what Paul wrote in Colossians 1: 16:

**For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (emphasis added)**

Christ created everything around us, and He did it for Himself! That is, that in His creation we would discover *Him*—that all creation, and our enjoyment of it, would ultimately glorify *Him*.

Put another way, as believers we are to see all of life from a *heavenly* perspective. As we age, and our physical sight becomes clouded by cataracts, our spiritual sight just keeps getting brighter and clearer.

**Second**, having found Him, we are to make Christ the first place we go. Out of all the worldly pleasures available to us, He is to be our priority. He is to be, as Jesus Himself put it in Revelation 2, our “first love.”

We are to be preoccupied with “things above,” preoccupied with things of God, of righteousness, of spiritual wisdom and insight, of purity and grace—all of which stand in opposition to the things below, things of the earth. We are in this world, and we are to maintain normal relationships in this world—we are not to go into reclusive hiding. But, as William Barclay, writes,

there will be this difference—from now on the Christian will see everything in the light and against the background of eternity...He will no longer live as if this world was all that mattered; he will see this world against the background of the large world of eternity.

Or, as J.B. Lightfoot put more succinctly,

You must not only *seek* heaven; you must also *think* heaven.

Once we have found it, heaven—God and His eternity—should be always on our mind. What does this look like?

**Read Colossians 3:15-17.**

## vv3-4

We are to do this—we *want* to do this—because, as v3 puts it, we have died, and now dwell with Christ.

### Read vv3-4.

Paul uses the word *krypto* (kroop'-to) here to describe an aspect of our relationship with Christ, and it means pretty much what you would think.

**hidden** = *krypto* = a primary verb; **to conceal** (properly by covering) :- hide (self), **keep secret**, secret [-ly].

But what does it mean that our “life is hidden with Christ in God”? There are two ways to look at this—neither of which cancel out the other. The first speaks to our *position* in Christ, that we are supernaturally changed, but that change is not something revealed physically on earth, but only seen in heaven. Douglas J. Moo explains:

This “hidden”/“revealed” motif (in vv3-4) is fundamental to the widespread Jewish apocalyptic worldview. According to this perspective, many things relating to God and his purposes exist in the present, but because they are in heaven, they are hidden from human sight. But the apocalyptic seer is given a vision of these things, things that will one day be revealed as they come to pass and are seen by people on earth. So, Paul suggests, at the present time our heavenly identity is real, but it is hidden. We have certainly not been physically transported to heaven; nor do we, who belong to the heavenly realm, look any different from those around us who still belong to this world. Verse 4 affirms that this will one day change. In the meantime, our true status is veiled; and, though we may not look any different than those around us, Paul’s point in this context is that we certainly need to *behave* differently. (emphasis added)

This is reflected in what the apostle John wrote in his first epistle.

### Read 1 John 3:1-2.

But there is a second way in which we are “hidden with Christ in God.” “Hidden” can also denote security, safety.

### Read Psalm 27:1,4-5.

When we are His, in Christ, God protects us; He shelters us “under His wings,” as a hen protects her brood.

We have been “raised up with Christ.” Though on the surface we may not look any different from our unsaved neighbor, we now belong to heaven. God sees our changed state; Christ Jesus *lives in* our changed state; and in that changed state we fall under the protective love of Father God.

### Read Psalm 91:1-4.