

Col. 3:1-4 - Set Your Mind on Things Above

Written by Tim Black

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1.

Body

1.

Seek the things that are above 1

1.

First Paul exhorts us in v. 1 to **seek the things that are above**.

1.

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.

Ground: Union with Christ 1a

1.

Paul grounds his exhortations throughout this passage in the fact of your union with Christ.

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“Since then you have been raised with Christ”

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Paul is building on what he has already taught us in **2:12-13**, that you were

buried

with Christ in baptism, and

raised

with Him through faith. At the center of your union with Christ is the fact that you are united with Him in His death and resurrection. In

2:20

Paul said “
with Christ you
died

to the basic principles of the world.

” Through Christ’s death you died to the powers of this dark world.
“

Sin shall no longer be your master.

” (

Rom. 6:14

) Now in

3:1

Paul expresses the complementary truth that with Christ not only have you
died

to sin, but also you have been
raised

to life with Christ. Christ is your representative who died in your place, and produced your new life in His resurrection, and it is He who is now the source of your spiritual life. When you first come to believe on Him as your Savior, He works a radical change within you—He convicts you of your sin and grants you the gift of repentance unto life so that you turn away from your sin to Him as your Savior. At your conversion the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection are applied to you, so that you died, and now you have been raised with Christ to newness of life.

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Exhortation: Seek the things that are above 1b

1.

Have you been “**raised with Christ?**” Has Christ worked this radical change in you? Has He made you one who now hates your sin, and desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus? Then why do you turn away from godliness and throw yourself again into sin? Oh, I know it catches you unaware at times, I know it’s often true it was someone else who provoked you to anger, spite, jealousy, or malice, but in the end these are empty excuses to cover over the shameful reality of your guilt. Are you one whom God has granted conviction of sin and godly repentance? Then admit your sin, and seek Christ your Savior. “**If...you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.**”

2.

Why have you turned away from godliness and stubbornly participated in sin this past week? Paul tells you why. It is because you did not “**seek the things that are above.**”

”

3.

There is certainly a rebuke implicit in Paul's words here. But the greater part of Paul's point is a strong encouragement to grow as Christians. It is the encouragement Paul makes explicit elsewhere, as he says in Romans 2:7:

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Romans 2:7 to those who by patience in well-doing **seek** for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

-

Location: Heaven 1c

1.

Paul says the things we should seek are “**above**.”

” To

what location

is he directing us? From where should we seek these things? Paul says this location is

-

“**Where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God**”

-

Heaven. In Ephesians 1:20 Paul

makes clear that this location is
heaven

. He says the Father

-

Ephesians 1:20 raised him from the
dead and seated him at his right hand
in the **heavenly**
places

-

Christ. At the center of our focus
should be Christ. The things above

are “ **where Christ is.**” Our pursuit should be to gain more of the things that are found where our Savior is.

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“Turn your eyes upon Jesus;
Look full in His wonderful face.
And the things of earth will
grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and
grace.”

-

Exaltation.

-

Paul points us not to seek Christ on the cross, or Christ risen from the grave but still on the earth. Paul points us to seek Christ in heaven, Christ in His exaltation. Christ our Savior is now in a position of glory and honor and power. He sits at the right hand of God the Father, which means He sits in the seat of a king, as the

one who rules with all the power of the almighty God. In that position He is the central object of all worship in heaven and on earth, and by His intercession He presents us in God's presence, prays for us, and makes us acceptable in God's sight. He has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us, and from that place even now Christ is our source of peace with God and life through His name. From there He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

-

He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and He now holds before you the heavenly crown of life. Do you see it? Or do you only see the straws and sticks and dust of the things of this world?

-

Set your mind on the things above 2

1.

If you know that your vision is too often set on the things of this world, you need to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

” What are those “
things that are above?
”

2.

Distinction. This exhortation in v. 2 to “set your minds on” is different from the exhortation in v. 1 to “seek” the things that are above. To set your mind on things above involves setting your affections, your desires, on them. It indicates an inner disposition, rather than a practical pursuit. But it also requires that you have an intellectual knowledge of

what those things are on which you are to set your mind. For this reason Paul introduces a distinction to make more clear what he means. He distinguishes the “
things above
” from the “
things that are on earth.
”

1.

The things above he has already implied are things in

heaven, because that is
where Christ is seated at the
right hand of God.

2.

But now he distinguishes the
things above from “things
that are on earth.”

3.

Location: Heaven vs. Earth. What differentiates these two sets of “**things**”

is their location, and their locations indicate the nature of the “

things

” in view. The one set is in heaven

,
the other is on earth

.

4.

Christ and God.

Certainly Paul directs us
to set our minds on

Christ

and on

God

, both of whom are in
heaven, according to v. 1.

5.

**Salvation blessings,
moral purity.** But there
are other things we should
be concerned about as well,
indicated by the difference
between heaven and earth.
Jesus distinguishes
heaven and earth in this
way:

-

Matthew 6:19-20 19

"Do not lay up for yourselves

treasures on earth

, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20

but lay up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**

, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

-

The things in heaven decay and can be taken away, the things in heaven do not decay and cannot be taken away. These treasures in heaven have the ring of the blessings of salvation, of eternal life in all of its

aspects

. In

Col. 3:5

, Paul tells us to put to death the things that are “earthly” in us and specifies them as a list of sins, and contrasts them in vv. 12ff with a list of

Christian virtues

. In Romans 8:5-6 Paul uses a figure of speech that parallels v. 2:

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Romans 8:5-6 5 For those who live according to the flesh **set their minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit **set their minds** on the things of the Spirit. 6 To

set the mind

on the flesh is death,

but to

set the mind

on the Spirit is life and
peace.

-

By tying these threads together we can see that the things associated with God in heaven are m

orally pure

,
and the things
associated with earth are
morally evil

. In Romans 8 Paul
says the
flesh

brings weakness,
hostility, sin, fear, slavery,
condemnation, death,

and decay, and the Spirit

brings life,
righteousness, adoption,
freedom, peace,
submission, and
glorification.

-

Summary. We can summarize that the things on which we should set our minds are God

,
eternal life

,
salvation blessings

,
Christian virtues

, and anything that is

morally pure

. Paul exhorts you to
focus on these things, as
he also says in
Philippians 4:8

,

-

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is

lovely

, whatever is

commendable

, if there is any

excellence

, if there is anything

worthy of praise

,
think about these

things

▪

-

Interrelation.

1.

Now does this mean that we should despise all earthly things?

Matthew Henry says it does. Commentators John Eadie and Alexander Maclaren say we should not despise earthly things, but should consider them means to God's ends, and so of subordinate

importance. Eadie says,

-

“The pilgrim is not to despise the comforts he may meet with by the way, but he is not to tarry among them, or leave them with

regret.” [1](#)

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I want to agree with Eadie's view, but what view does scripture require us to take?

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The deciding

principle is this: we must be thankful for God's good creation, and despise its sinful perversion. And certainly God's creation can be used in the service of pursuing the things above. “For everything created by God is good, and

nothing is to be rejected
if it is received with
thanksgiving.

” (

1 Timothy 4:4

)

But a key perversion
you should flee with all
your might is the
desire to gain an
earthly

blessing when God
offers a
heavenly
blessing that is far
better. This is the true
devotion that God
desires.

—

Hebrews 11:15-16

15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire

a better country
, that is,
a heavenly one
. Therefore God is
not ashamed to be
called their God, for he
has prepared for
them
a city
.

-

Do not be like
Esau, who traded his
heavenly birthright for
a bowl of earthly
pottage. Do not be
like the wedding
guests whose

response was “I cannot come to the banquet; don’t trouble me now. I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow. I have fields and commitments that cost a pretty sum. Pray hold me

excused, I cannot
come!” Do you want
to come to the
wedding feast of
the Lamb? If you do,
I have good news for
you—not only will
you be a guest, but
you will be the Bride!
What amazing

blessings await you if only you have eyes to see, and ears to hear, of the good news of salvation in Christ. Desire the blessings of salvation, and set your mind on the things that are above. It is worth it

beyond your wildest
imagination. Paul
says,

-

Philippians

3:8-11 8 Indeed, I
count everything

as loss because of
the **surpassin**
g **wort**
h

of knowing Christ
Jesus my Lord. For
his sake I have
suffered the
loss

of all things and

count them as
rubbish

, in order that I
may

gain Christ

9 and be found in
him, not having a
righteousness

of my own that
comes from the law,

but that which comes
through
faith
in Christ, the
righteousness
from God that
depends on faith- 10
that I may know him
and the
power

of his
resurrection
, and may share
his
sufferings
, becoming like
him in his death, 11
that by any means
possible I may
attain the resurrection

from the dead.

—

Application.

1.

Now do you set
your mind on things
above? Take stock

of your thought
life. On what objects
do you allow your
thoughts to dwell?
What station do
you tune your radio
to? What songs fill
your head? What
are you watching on
the TV, reading in

the paper, talking
about when you sit
down and when you
rise up? On
weekdays does
your Bible, do the
very words of God,
sit unread and
unheard amidst a
clamor of worldly

information in your
life? What
thoughts fill your
mind when you
become angry at
someone in your
household? I tell
you, what goes into
your mind today will
come out of your

heart tomorrow. Are
they the things of
God? Or the
things of this world?
Take Paul's warning
to heart when he
tells you,

-

1 Timothy

6:10-11 10 ...the

love of money is a
root of all kinds of
evils. It is through
this craving that
some have
wandered away from
the faith and
pierced themselves

with many pangs.

11 But as for you, O
man of God, flee
these things.

Pursue

righteousness,
godliness, faith, love,
steadfastness,
gentleness.

-

Christian, there is
a more pure love
than the love of this
world. You have
a higher calling, a

calling from God
above. Cry out to
God with a pure
devotion to Him.

-

Psalm 73:25-26

25 Whom have I
in heaven but you?
And there is nothing
on earth that I
desire besides you.

26 My flesh and my
heart may fail,
but God is the
strength of my heart

and my portion
forever.

-

Because Christ is your life 3-4

1.

Now why should

you set your mind
on things above,
and not on earthly
things? What is
the rea
son
for doing this? In v.
1 Paul has already
given you the

ground for his
exhortation--“

you have been
raised with Christ.

” But now he
drives you to the
vital core of why
you must set your
mind on things

above. The
reason is that
Christ is your life.
He says,

1.

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.

2.

The fact.

1.

I want to be
frank with you. I
don't think many of
you fully believe
what this passage
says. It says that “
Christ...is your
life.”
It does not say

Christ is the
source

of your life,
though He
certainly is that.
But it says Christ
IS

your life. It does
not say Christ is

the
Guarantor
of your life. It
says Christ
IS
your life. Do you
believe that?

2.

If you don't believe that, then you lack the vital reason to set your mind on things above. If you do believe

that, then you do
not need any
other reason to
set your mind on
things above.
Christ is your life.

3.

Paul cannot be denying the biblical distinction between the Creator and the creature. Scripture is absolutely clear

that there is an
absolute
distinction
between the being
of God and the
being of man.
God is not human.
Man is not divine.

Not in any way.

4.

Yet for those
who are saved,
Christ is your life.
His life is your

life. He is the
core of your
eternal life.

-

1 John 1:2 2
the life was made

manifest, and we
have seen it, and
testify to it and
proclaim to you
the eternal life,
which was with
the Father and
was made

manifest to us.

—

If you did not

have Christ, you
would not have
this life.

-

1 John

5:11-12 11 And
this is the
testimony, that
God gave us
eternal life, and
this life is in
his Son. 12
Whoever has the

Son has life;
whoever does not
have the Son
of God does not
have life.

—

But if you are
a Christian,
Christ's life is
manifest in you.

-

2

Corinthians

4:10-11 **10**

always

carrying in the

body the death
of Jesus, so that
the life of
Jesus may also
be manifested in
our bodies.

—

His life is
what animates
you. It is what
makes you a
new creature.

It is because He
lives in you that
you have eternal
life.

—

Galatians

2:20 20 I have

been crucified

with Christ.

It is no longer I

who live, but

Christ who

lives in me



—

This is what

Christ told you
when He was
still with you.

—

John

14:19-20 19

**Yet a little while
and the
world will see
me no more, but
you will see me.
Beca**

use I live,
you also will
live .

20 In that
day you will
know that I am
in my Father,

and
you in me
, and
I in you
.

—

Illustrations

1.

The fact that
Christ is your
life is like a
nation ruled

exclusively
by a king that
can truthfully
say the king is
the nation. If
we lose the
king, we lose

the nation. Its
distinctive life is
gone.

2.

It is like a
wife who knows
“If my husband
dies, I lose my
marriage.”

3.

It is like a
boxing
manager who
says “If I lose
my prize

fighter, my
business is
dead.”

4.

It is like a
blood donor
who warns the
nurse, “If you
take two
thirds of my
blood, you will

take my life.”

5.

It is like a
patient on a

heart-lung
machine who
says “Where
this machine
goes, I go,
because this
machine is my

life.”

6.

Application

1.

If Christ is
your life, you

must pay
attention to
where He is.

You must
pay attention to
the things He is
doing for you.

You must set
your mind to
follow His
priorities, His
plans, the
course of His
life. And where

He goes your
heart, and
mind, and life
must follow.

-

Philippians

**1:21 For to
me to live is
Christ ,
and to die is
gain.**

—

He has now
gone on into

heaven, into
glory, where
you do not yet
see Him.
And so Paul
says that our
life is “hid” with

Christ in
God. It is
hidden for now,
and so you
must believe
by faith in
the as yet

unseen glory of
the inheritance
kept for you,
ready to be
revealed at the
last time. And
as **1 John**

3:2-3 says,
we must
purify
ourselves in
the hope of the
day when His
full glory will

finally be
revealed.

-

1 John

3:2-3 2

Beloved, we
are God's
children now,
and what we
will be has not
yet appeared;

but we
know that
when he
appears we
shall be like
him, because
we shall

see him as he
is. 3 And
everyone who
thus hopes in
him purifies
himself as he
is pure.

-

If you know
that Christ is

your life, then
be one of
those of whom
1 Peter
1:8-9 speaks:

—

1 Peter

1:8-9 8

Though you
have not
seen him, you

love him.
Though you do
not now see
him, you
believe in him
and rejoice
with joy that is

inexpressible
and filled
with glory, 9
obtaining the
outcome of
your faith, the
salvation of

your souls.

—

And know
this for
certain, that
when He
appears in all
of the glory
of His

resurrection
life, you too
will appear
with Him in
glory. For

—

Philippians

3:20-21 20 o

ur

citizenship is
in heaven

, and from
it we await a
Savior, the
Lord Jesus
Christ, 21
who will
transform our

lowly body to
be like his
glorious body,
by the
power that
enables him
even to

subject all
things to
himself.

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1 John Eadie, Commentary, 215.