

Colossians 3:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-3/colossians-31-4/>

Paul reminds the Colossians of their standing with Christ, over and against the mindset of the flesh.

The conjunction that begins Chapter Three (translated *therefore*, “then,” or “now”) indicates that something necessarily follows from another. It might also be translated “certainly.” So, the if/then clause that makes up verse 1 carries the strong suggestion that the condition applies to the Colossians.

Chapter 2 ended with Paul asserting that the Colossians had “died with Christ” so therefore should not be trying to earn any standing with Jesus based on religious rules, what Paul called “self-made religion” (Colossians 2:20,23). Not only have the Colossian believers died with Christ, they have been *raised up with Christ*. When we believe in Jesus, we are baptized into His death, and raised to new life in His resurrection. Paul argues that since the Colossians have been buried and raised to new life, they ought then to *set your mind on the things above* rather than following religious rules and seeking to please the opinions of men.

Paul spent much of Chapter 2 convincing the Colossian believers to stay true to their initial standing in Christ. Paul is trying to persuade the Colossians from being distracted by “the commandments and teachings of men” (Colossians 2:22). These men were teaching that they must follow religious rules in order to be righteous.

But this is not true. The Colossians *have been raised up with Christ*. That means they are already righteous in God’s sight, because of the death of Jesus and the power of the resurrection (Colossians 2:14). Following man-made rules simply puts them under the authority of self-serving humans. Paul wants them to follow Christ instead.

The thesis of Chapter 2 was that the Colossians have been redeemed through Christ, not through the legality of following rules. It ends imploring the Colossians to choose Godly wisdom over worldly wisdom and to elevate beyond the superficial principles of the world. Through their inheritance in Christ, they have been *raised up*. They are no longer slaves to these worldly ways of thinking, nor to their own flesh.

The flesh is still present, but its power has been broken. Christ has elevated believers to a greater capacity of living. It is this upon which Paul wants the Colossians to focus—to center on what Christ has done, and the supernatural power He provides, rather than their own natural ability to follow the religious rules.

Paul wants the Colossians to pursue a deeper understanding of truth, based on faith. In this manner they can live the reality of the resurrection power of Jesus flowing through them. This is dramatically superior to following the rules of men. As Paul states in Romans, God’s law is fulfilled when we walk in the Spirit by faith (Romans 8:4). When men make rules, it is generally

to get people under their control (for their own perceived benefit) rather than to lead them to Christ (which leads to our true benefit).

Because of this reality, Paul tells the Colossians to *keep seeking the things above, where Christ is*. The word for *keep seeking* here is the Greek word “zeteo,” which means “seek in order to find.” It can also mean to crave something. The idea seems to be that if we keep looking for it, we will get to it. Consistent with much of Paul’s writing, he implores the Colossians to stay consistent and pursue things above rather than things below. They have been raised up. It would be foolishness to forsake things above for things below.

Above is where *Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*. This is not meant to be about geography, as if God lives in the clouds and Satan in the earth’s molten core, like so much fiction suggests. *Above* focuses on spiritual truths and moral judgements. The way of Christ is higher, meaning it is true and real. Therefore, it is also more effective. It is, in every sense, better. The things of this earth are a shadow of the glory and revelation of Christ.

Christ is in this “place” (again, not so much a location as a mindset/perspective), *seated at the right hand of God*. This is where Christ resides. The *right hand of God* is the place of ultimate authority. Jesus has been given authority over all things in heaven and on earth as a reward for His faithful service while on the earth (Matthew 28:18). It is also a place of honor.

Jesus was given this great authority because He humbled Himself, and learned obedience, even unto death (Philippians 2:8-9). It is also a place of continued service, as well as partnership with His Father (think of when we say someone is a right-hand man). Christ is with God, and is God. He is pictured as seated showing His settled authority over all. This is the dwelling place of God, where He stations himself.

So Paul is encouraging the Colossians to search out those things that are in this place of true authority, service, and honor. To participate in thoughts, actions, and attitudes consistent with The Kingdom of Heaven. Through the work of Jesus on the cross (and His resurrection), they have been elevated to that place with Him, and ought to make the very most of it by searching out the things indicative of that place.

Paul makes this distinction again: *set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth*. The Greek word for *set your mind* is “phroneo.” It can mean “mindset,” “think,” or “consider.” It can also mean “set your affections toward.” In essence, Paul is telling the Colossians to orient their perspective here on earth by the *things above*. Tune your heart to them. Spend your time thinking about them. Root your view of reality on earth with the reality of heaven.

One of the three things we control as humans is the perspective or mindset (“phroneo”) we choose. Our attitude or worldview. This greatly affects the other two things we control: who we trust and what we do. Paul exhorts the Colossians to choose a mindset, a “phroneo” that is based in eternal truth (things above) rather than temporal illusion (things below).

The Greek word “phroneo” appears ten times in the short letter Paul wrote to the Philippians. The theme of Philippians is to choose a mindset (“phroneo”) that is true and real. A mindset rooted in the reality of God and His creation. The way to gain such a mindset is to think. To dwell. To reason. Not just on anything, but to reason about the right things, beginning with things that are true. Paul urged the Philippians to choose a mindset (“phroneo”) that was the same as the mindset chosen by Jesus. Jesus chose to leave a place of comfort and follow His Father in obedience. As a result, He gained something much greater than the comfort He left behind (Philippians 2:5-9).

This choice of heavenly-focused mindset stands in contrast to *the things that are on earth*. Again, this is a type of metaphor. There are plenty of heavenly things on this planet. Paul is not saying we ought to disregard nature and marriage and things that occur on earth. He is saying we ought to avoid an earth-centered perspective. One that finds its fullest hope and trust in the physical things we can see, grasp, and understand. The Bible often uses this dichotomous language, the way of Heaven versus the way of the World.

Paul explains further: *for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God*. In order to be raised up with Christ, the Colossian believers were also crucified with Christ. The death is to our old man, our flesh. Death is, essentially, a separation. So, when we were raised up with Christ, we were necessarily separated from the world. We have a new man that is newly born (John 3:3). We are a new creature, newly created by Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). In order to have this new birth, it had to be wholly separate from the old man, hence the death.

That is reality. But seeing reality is a mindset or perspective that must be chosen. It is also a mindset that the old nature, the flesh, does not like and will fight against. Hence the need to make a choice. A choice to see ourselves in a manner that is true. A manner that does not place faith in self (as the flesh desires) but rather faith in God.

Faith, for the believer, is in God rather than self. *Life is hidden with Christ*. The Greek word for *hidden* is “krypto,” from which we get words like “cryptic.” It is mysterious, enigmatic, uncertain. Our lives now depend on faith in God. This requires us to embrace the reality of what we do not know. It requires us to concede the many things we do not control. Our anxiety does not actually control the future. Our bitterness does not alter the past.

Faith requires an acknowledgment that we do not know and do not understand. It is a belief in what we cannot see, things we cannot experience tangibly (Hebrews 11:1). Choosing a heavenly mindset (“phroneo”) means that we choose to trust in One outside (but also within) ourselves—Jesus. It is choosing to believe the intangible heavenly truths as though they were something we could hold in our hands.

In this way, our lives are *hidden*, because our truest self is our spiritual self, and our spiritual selves are not visible to others. But our true self is not abandoned or neglected, but rather is *hidden with Christ*. That means that Jesus is with us, and we are in Him. He is our advocate and, in many ways, our interpreter. He is the thing in which we place our trust. When we choose to walk in the heavenly reality of our new selves, setting aside the old nature, we are living the resurrection power of Jesus.

So, then, our lives are *hidden with Christ in God*. This means we now have the opportunity to live as Christ lived and gain the same rewards Christ gained. This is an astonishing revelation. We of course can never be divine. But because we are *raised up with Christ* and *hidden in Christ* we can actually live life with a full measure of resurrection power.

All of this requires tremendous faith. That is the *hidden* part. But the key is the reality of *Jesus* as the center and supreme of all existence. And that source and creator of existence is in us, and we are in Him. In order to gain the full benefit of this, we must choose a mindset (“*phroneo*”) that recognizes these spiritual realities. To fully participate in this immense opportunity we must walk in those realities, even as Jesus chose to do (Philippians 2:8).

Paul says, *when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory*. *Glory* (“*doxa*” in Greek) means the essence of something being observed. So, when Christ reveals His essence, in the next life, He will also reveal our essence—which will be like His if we lived as He lived. The *glory* Jesus gained from His life on earth was manifold, but included being approved and rewarded by His Father for faithful service. Jesus also promises to approve and reward His servants who choose His mindset, learn obedience, and trust in His reward (Hebrews 11:6; Revelation 3:21, 22:12).

The truth is our lives were no less hidden when we were living according to the world. We still had faith. It is just that we had faith in something that is not a firm foundation. Perhaps we had faith in ourselves, and allowed ourselves the illusion that we control circumstances, or the choices of others. Being raised with Christ frees us. It gives us divine power to choose reality, and escape illusion. It allows us to acknowledge our need to trust in something higher than ourselves. It gives us this great power, but we must choose to walk in that power. Paul offers a motivation for such a choice—that we might also be *revealed with Him in glory*.

All of this is Paul’s introduction to *the things above*. He will unpack it as the chapter progresses, but is here establishing that the Colossian believers belong to Christ and His superior way.

Biblical Text

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.