

Set Your Mind on Things Above

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** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Before we start looking at Colossians 3:1-4, let's warm up our minds. Does the sun go around the earth or does the earth go around the sun? You probably think that this question is far too easy. Obviously the earth goes around the sun. We have all learned this as fact. But, for a long time in human history people thought the earth was the center of the universe. You see this in the way we talk about the sun rising and setting. The real question is "what changed when human beings realized that the earth goes around the sun?" You have to agree that realizing that the earth goes around the sun does not make the earth start going around the sun. The earth has always revolved around the sun. The truth is that the sun is the center of our solar system, and even when human beings rejected it that was still true.

In a similar way, this is true in mankind's relationship with God. Human beings need God. Humans are created in God's image. They are dependent on God for their existence. They receive the moral law from God and much more. BUT mankind has rebelled against God, and believes that it doesn't need God to live. The truth of man's need for God is written on the human heart, but man denies this fact.

As Christians, we are brought back into proper relation with God through Christ. In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul is continuing to compare the real state of Christians with that of false teaching. However, now Paul is starting to show what makes Christ so much better than the what the world has to offer. False teaching cannot stop the flesh (Col 2:23), but the Christian, who has their life centered on Christ, does not live for the indulgence of the flesh. In other words, based on the Christian's connection with Jesus, the Christian's life is centered on heavenly things rather than earthly things. You see, the life of the Christian is tied to the suffering and the glory of Christ. We have what we can call "the confidence of the cross"...and we have the promise of the second coming to anchor our lives.

According to the letter to the Colossians, Christians have an entirely new center of gravity. Colossians 3:1 says "If then you have been raised with Christ..." this is in comparison with all that he has been saying in the previous verses. False teaching and all its traps can't stop the flesh. But the person who is in Christ Jesus is different. "IF then you have been raised with Christ" our lives have been changed. The old nature desired prosperity, power, and pleasure. Our new nature is focused on the person and work of Christ. Paul says that "we have died" to the old self and its desires, and "our lives are hidden with Christ in God." This means that for the Christian the focus of life has shifted from an essentially self-centered life to a life that is centered on Christ. Our text today calls this "setting our minds on things above" or "seeking the things that are above". The orientation of your life (if you are a Christian) is pointing to God.

The new center of gravity or the new direction for our lives is all due to the work of Christ Jesus. Because of Christ, we have new life. He bought us out of slavery to sin and the wrath of God. He gave us life.

He secures us (v.3 “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”). Jesus suffered, died, and was resurrected. After that he ascended to the right hand of the Father. Moreover, he is coming again. We have to see ourselves in this. We are included in all of this. This is what I mean when I say that we should have the confidence of the cross. Jesus’s death and resurrection means that he has purchased for us a new life. Our lives are hidden in Christ. In Christ, we share in his sufferings, we have died to the world, we have been raised to new life, and our minds/affections are set on “things above.” And when Christ returns we will share in his glory. We do not go through life like other people. Though we suffer, we do not suffer with no hope because even in our suffering we are suffering in Christ. We will work, marry, raise children, and engage with life as people who are not living for themselves. After all, our lives are hidden with Christ in God. When Christ returns in his glory we will be with him. What does the world have to offer us better than being with Christ in his glory?

What indeed? Truly the problem with what I am saying is that we don’t feel this reality every day. I do not know about you, but I rarely feel like I am on my way to conquering the world. The pressures of daily life seem likely to overwhelm me. What encouragement is there for those of us who feel weary? First of all, even if we do not feel or sense the coming victory of Christ Jesus, that doesn’t mean that it is not on the way. What will happen in the world has very little to do with what I think or feel. When I am at my most tired and worn down, I am not very receptive to encouragement—especially when someone tries to point out how valuable I am. I have lots of excuses, and I know what is happening in my heart better than other people. That said, one thing that can and has brought me encouragement is that God is still working out his will in the world (and in my life). God’s cosmic power doesn’t always seem like a source of encouragement either, but the point is that the thing that is moving my life forward doesn’t depend on me. It comes from God. And God never gets tired. His will is always performed. I don’t have to worry about being able to control my future. I can calmly face each day with my life in God’s hands.

The second thing that I can do is fix my eyes on the things that are above rather than the things that are on the earth. On the one hand, Paul’s command to fix our eyes on things above seems like it does not need to be said. After all, aren’t we in Christ? Being in Christ should be enough for us to resist the worldly passions and desires that mark the lives of people who are not in Christ. On the other hand, this is exactly the kind of encouragement we need when we feel weary. We have all these great promises laid on us. We have been given new life and forgiveness of sins. Is that enough? It is so good and it is enough, but we are still being tempted. I believe I have said this before, but the problem with our sin and temptation is that it comes from within us and comes at us from the world. Paul is saying that when temptations and false teachings come at us, we need to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is...[to] set your mind on things above, not on things that are on earth.” Firstly, I think we can safely summarize both of Paul’s commands into one command. There is likely some nuance between seeking the things that are above and setting our minds on things that are above, but for the sake of length we can lump them together. Both have the focus on the “things above” and both have the same force. Simply put “to seek” or “to set our minds” means that we put all our focus on the things that are above. However, focus isn’t really strong enough. Paul is calling for Christians to put their attention on these things. Or to put it yet another way, Christians are here being called to contemplate, to dwell on, to meditate on the things that are above. Another nuance present in Paul’s command is that he is calling us to strive for and to anchor our lives on these things that are above. In other words, Paul’s call for

Christians to put their attention on things above is a call to center one's life on heavenly things. By saying that we should center our Christian lives on heavenly things, I am trying to capture an important point. For one, the truth is that if we are in Christ, our lives are already moving in a God-ward direction. Conversion itself is God's work in bringing sinners to himself and giving them new life in Christ. This reality means that the center of the Christian life is Christ. Another important aspect of this is that a Christian must actively seek to center his or her life on these truths. It is not an automatic thing. There are many reasons for this, but the simplest way to think about it is from the text itself. Paul says set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth. The fact that he has to say "do not set your minds on earthly things" means that that is the natural thing. The sinful condition in which we are born still has sway over how we think, what we desire, and who we want in our lives. Paul's answer to the enduring sin nature is to anchor our minds on heavenly things. The longer we walk the Christian life, the more we should be gazing on Christ Jesus. Little by little all of our life orbits the things that are set in heaven. The center of gravity for our lives should be the things above.

So what are the things that are above? Well, there are many excellent things in heaven, but we only have time to highlight a few. For example, in heaven truth, goodness, and beauty are on display. Most people believe that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Or that goodness is cultural. Or that truth is subjective. This shows how deceived people are. Truth, beauty, and goodness all come from God and reflect his very nature. Truth can be made personal, but there is no such thing as something true for you that is not true for me. Truth is not a human creation and therefore it does not change. The same is true for goodness and beauty. There is something transcendent about beauty. Natural beauty or things that capture natural beauty are the things that grip us. True beauty is full of glory. It dazzles and delights us. Human beauty fades and so do the things of this earth, but God's glory never fades or gets tarnished. In creation, God said the things he made were good, but they were made corrupt by the Fall. However, the mind that ordered the world and put the law in the heart of man is in heaven. Truly we should have our minds set on God's goodness, truth, and beauty.

Another thing in heaven for us to set our minds on is the grace of God. Spend time contemplating the many ways the Lord has been merciful to you and to the people of the Scriptures. We will find it harder to complain about our lives or search for something "better" when we reflect on how much the Lord has done for us.

However, there is something in heaven that is much closer to our hearts than these other things. Actually I should probably say that there is someone in heaven that is more precious to us than any virtue or vision of God's character. The Word of God made flesh sits at the Father's right hand on high. He intercedes for us. He holds us in the palm of his hand and nothing can snatch us from his hand. Truly our gaze should be fixed on the things in heaven, where our Savior is because we should be seeking our Savior in all things.

Our entire being is secured or hidden in Christ Jesus. We await his return and to be with him in his glory. While we wait for his return we anchor our lives on heavenly things. By having our minds fixed on God's character, the grace of God, and our Savior, our lives will be slowly transformed into the image of our Savior. As our lives are transformed into the image of our Savior, our desires change to match the things we are contemplating. This is a natural process, but it does not start naturally. As we have already seen, sin is our natural state. We have to have something break the inertia of our souls. We are set

against God and his Son, but then the grace of God breaks forth in our hearts. His work starts us off in a new direction.

Perhaps there is someone here that isn't sure they are following Christ. I would encourage you to trust in the Lord Jesus. Do not delay in responding. You are missing out on time you could spend seeing heavenly realities. For those of us who are trusting in Christ, we are supposed to be seeking these heavenly things. How is that going for you? What are some things you are doing to set your mind on things above? I am sure you feel the conflict of the old self pulling you to the things that everyone else is wanting, but where have you seen your heart desiring Christian things? For example, the commitment to come to church every week is something that might have been hard at first, but the more often you come the easier it gets. I am sure there are more things in your life that are evidences of these new desires, but where are some areas that you might need to turn away from earthly desires? Are there areas of your life that you find it difficult to center your life on Christ and his Word? I encourage you to ask yourself these questions. Our hearts can deceive us so ask other trusted people as well. God has done a great work in us, we are not bound by sin anymore. Let us live with our hearts set on Christ.