

HEAVENLY MINDED**Colossians 3:1-4**

“Since you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

Have you heard the statement: "You're so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good?" According to the Bible, just the opposite of that statement is true. We can be so earthly minded that we are no heavenly good! Colossians 3:1-4 is a call to live the "upward" life here "below", to live with eternity's values in view.

Many live on a spiritual poverty level when we have all of the "*riches of grace*" (Ephesians 1:7) in Christ Jesus. The high cost of low living is certainly taking its toll upon individual Christians and upon the church of Jesus Christ in general.

Consider three truths relative to the Heavenly Minded contained in the first four verses in Colossians chapter three:

OUR DIGNITY - We Are *Identified* With Christ

“...you were raised with Christ... for you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Identity theft is a growing crime in the United States. It occurs when one's personal information is stolen and used. The perpetrator commits fraud by pretending to be someone they are not. There are many companies that sell products that they claim will prevent identity theft. One such commercial offers a "Complete Idiot's Guide to Recovering from Identity Theft" and they solicit your business by urging everyone to "Safeguard Your Identity."

As Christians, our identity as children of God is safeguarded in and by the Lord Jesus Christ! Do we understand how God sees us? Do we understand how permanent is our identity in Christ? Let us look at how God sees us:

A. We Died With Christ.

In order for the Lord Jesus to be raised He had first to be dead. Galatians 2:20 tells us that we were identified with Christ in His crucifixion: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

When Jesus died for our sins, God reckoned that believers were identified with Him in that death. Horatius Bonar, Scottish Presbyterian minister, author and hymn writer, explained his identity in Christ as follows: "Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die; another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity." And, all believers can say the same.

B. We Were Raised With Christ.

“Since you were raised with Christ...” (v.1) Paul said it like this in Ephesians 2:1 - *“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”*

This is co-crucifixion and co-resurrection – that’s God’s perspective. Crucified with Christ and raised with Christ. We have been saved from a condition of eternal death by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is an accomplished fact in the mind of God. Our old self and our old way of life are gone. We have been changed. We are new creatures as 2 Corinthians 5:17 says - *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”* In Christ you are a new you!

I have been present at several exhumations when bodies were removed from the grave for forensic purposes. It is not a pleasant sight. Suppose, for the purpose of illustrating what Paul is saying here in v.1, a body is being extracted from the grave, when suddenly that body is instantly reconstituted and restored to life and walks out of the cemetery!

Now, bring that analogy over into the spiritual realm. Our resurrection in and with Christ is none the less dramatic. To go back and re-enter that grave would be unthinkable. Yet there are many who call themselves Christian who are still wearing the old grave clothes of the former life of sin.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, we are told, *“The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go”* (John 11:44, NIV). Christian, take off the grave clothes, you’ve been raised to new life in Christ!

Paul begins this 3rd chapter of Colossians by saying, *“Since you were raised with Christ”* - that is a past fact. Are we realizing that tremendous truth in our daily lives? Let us cast off the grave clothes of the old life and live the life of identification with Christ.

Dr. Joseph Haroutunian was a professor at McCormick Theological Seminary in Philadelphia who came to America from Armenia. One day a well-meaning friend said to him, "Your name is difficult to pronounce and difficult to spell—it could hurt your professional career. Why don't you change your name to Harwood or Harwell or something like that?" Dr. Haroutunian asked, "What do those names mean?" His friend said, "Well, nothing. They are just easier to remember." Dr. Haroutunian said, "In Armenia, when my grandfather was baptized, they named him Haroutunian which means 'Resurrection.' I am Joseph Haroutunian and I will be a son of Resurrection all my days."

That man had not forgotten his true identity. As Christians, we are sons and daughters of Resurrection! If you want your past forgiven and your future to be what Jesus Christ promises, turn to Him now.

OUR DUTY - We Should Be *Occupied* With Christ

“...seek those things which are above “ (v.1); “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (v.2)

At salvation our minds were opened to the virtues and values of the spiritual dimension. Prior to our resurrection we were focused upon *“life under the sun”* (Ecclesiastes 1:3). At our spiritual awakening we discovered *“spiritual blessings in heavenly places is Christ Jesus.”* (Ephesians 1:3) Our Savior is above; our eternal home is above; our treasures are laid up

above. Therefore, it only stands to reason that if our hope is in Christ, we will set our sights on things above! Jesus said, *“Where your treasure is there will your heart be also”* (Matthew 6:21).

What Paul is instructing us to do in vs.1 and 2 is to mind our minds! With the impartation of the new nature at our new birth, we have a new mind. A wise person once said, *“As we think, so are we”* (Proverbs 23:7). Our lives are governed by our thoughts and we will ultimately pursue that about which we are thinking.

Note that we are instructed to *“seek”* and to *“set”* – to focus and fasten our minds upon Jesus Christ with whom we died and with whom we were raised.

A. “Seek” – Focus Our Minds Upon The Higher Virtues - “Seek those things which are above” (v.1)

The Living Bible puts it this way: *“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth”* (Colossians 3:1, 2).

When believers focus on the realities of heaven, they can then truly enjoy the world their heavenly Father has created. Focusing on the things above creates a sense of security, because no matter what happens in this world, we know that we have a better home above.

Paul challenged the believers in Philippi to focus their minds upon that which was elevating saying, *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things”* (Philippians 4:8).

Some Christians spend their time seeking things that do not matter in the light of eternity. They tend to focus on how bad things are, on things that we cannot change, things that are temporal and not eternal. In doing so they end up with negative attitudes and unfulfilled dreams and visions. We need to seek the things of God—heavenly things with eternal significance.

B. “Set” – Fasten Our Minds Upon The Higher Values - “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (v.2)

Seek the “above things” and, having discovered them, fasten your mind permanently upon the “above things.” The present tense in the original indicates continuous action. This, of course, does not mean withdrawal from all the activities of this world to engage only in contemplation of eternity and heaven. The verses that follow make it quite clear that Paul expected Christians to maintain normal relationships in this world.

William Barclay explains, “But 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." (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

To be preoccupied with heaven is to be preoccupied with the One Who reigns there, His purposes and plans. We must remember who we are in Christ, and those things that we think about should reflect our new relationship and new nature. We must focus and fasten our minds on the things of God with emancipated souls and enlightened minds.

The 18th century is often referred to as the "Age of Enlightenment." This was a philosophical battle to replace the authority of established institutions including churches, replacing conventional wisdom with Reason and Rationalism. Reason was advocated as the primary source and basis of authority, not faith.

At its core was a critical questioning of traditional institutions, customs, and morals. We in the Western world are still affected by the reverberations of "The Enlightenment" philosophy which is faithless. Prominent Enlightenment philosophers such as Thomas Payne, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume questioned and attacked the existing institutions of both Church and State.

"The Enlightenment" that we experience when we are born into God's family, far supersedes and excels the enlightenment that is earth-based. The enlightenment of the redeemed is from "above." That is why Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians that *"the eyes of your understanding might be enlightened"* (Ephesians 1:18). However, as long as our eyes are focused only upon things "below" we will not perceive the things "above."

The born-again ones, the new creations in Christ are not to be conformists in a worldly sense – "be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2a) – but are to be transformists – "be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2b) While we are not to be conformed to the world's standard, we are to be being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ as Paul instructs us in Romans 8:29 - "those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." And the result will be that the church can then impact and transform society.

How then can I be a conformist to Christ-likeness and a transformist in my home, school, on the job and in society in general? "Seek" and "set"! If we are not "seeking those things which are above" it is certain that we are not "setting" our "minds on things which are above" consequently we are not occupied with Christ.

One of our current worship choruses contains words that we should prayerfully sing:

*"Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus.
To reach out and touch him
And say that we love him;
Open our ears, Lord
And help us to listen.*

*Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus."*

Identified with Christ and Occupied with Christ, yes, and the best is yet to come: we shall be Glorified with Christ someday!

OUR DESTINY - We Shall Be *Glorified* With Christ

"When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

Paul assures believers that Christ, Who is our life, will return and that when He does we will experience a totally new dimension of life—we will be glorified, appearing in glory with Him. There are two "appearances" mentioned in Colossians 3:4. They are: Christ's appearance *for* us and our appearance *with* Him.

A. The Prospect of Christ's Future Appearance - "When Christ who is our life appears..."

Paul had no doubts about the return of Jesus Christ. He did not say, "If Christ who is our life appears" – he said, "When...he appears..." The words of Jesus Himself should give us all the confidence we need that He will come back for us: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

The certainty of Christ's re-appearance permeates the pages of the New Testament. Does the truth of the any moment return of Jesus Christ make any difference in how you live your life? Does it impact your associations, your attitudes and your actions? How does it influence your pursuits, your pastime, and your public lifestyle? Are you right now, this instant, ready and willing for Christ to suddenly appear?

B. The Promise of the Christian's Future Appearance - "you also will appear with Him in glory."

Our unsaved friends and associates do not understand who we really are in Christ. We are the regenerated, the twice-born ones; ours is the hidden life—"hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:2). The unregenerate cannot comprehend our state or standing with God. They may know that we call ourselves "Christians"; they may have some vague idea about what that means; they know that among them are people who are different but who are imperfect; however, what they do not know is that one day these "Christians" will suddenly have glorified bodies and be perfected in the ultimate sense.

1. The Believer's Glorification is Essential to Complete God's Redemptive Plan.
"Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:30).

2. The Believer's Glorification is Essential to Prepare Our Bodies for Heaven.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

3. The Believer’s Glorification is Essential to Make us Like Jesus Christ Bodily.

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Conclusion

Heavenly Mindedness should be translated into heavenly conduct on earth. Our confession of faith is one thing but the proof of the genuineness of our faith is seen in our lifestyle. Belief is one thing but behavior is quite another. Let us behave our beliefs!

Illust. An article in a San Francisco newspaper reported that a young man who once found a \$5 bill on the street resolved that from that time on he would never lift his eyes while walking. The paper went on to say that over the years he accumulated, among other things, 29,516 buttons, 54,172 pins, 12 cents, a bent back, and a miserly disposition. But he also lost something—the glory of sunlight, the radiance of the stars, the smiles of friends, and the freshness of blue skies.

Some Christians are totally earth focused. They are so engrossed with the things of this world that they give little attention to spiritual and eternal values that are ours in the world to come. The Christian who understands his identification in Christ, whose mind is occupied with Christ and who looks forward to being glorified with Christ will no longer live for this world but for the world to come. He will not be so earthly minded that he is no heavenly good!

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