



# LIVING WITH HEAVENLY PRIORITIES

COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

*By: H.B. Charles, Jr.*



## SERMON MANUSCRIPT

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Colossians 3:1-4 is a bridge that connects the doctrinal and practical sections of this letter. In chapters 1-2, Paul proclaims and defends the supremacy of Jesus Christ over creation, salvation, and the church. In chapters 3-4, he emphasizes the supremacy of Christ over the personal life of every Christian. The first half of this letter reveals a cosmic Christ who is the sovereign head of everything in creation. Then we meet a more personal Christ who seeks to exercise his lordship over the daily affairs of our lives – like our sexual purity, family relationships, and work ethics. This opening paragraph of Colossians 3 connects these two sections.

- It is a call to sanctification.
- It is a call to live out the reality of our salvation.
- It is a call to become what we already in Christ.

One day, Napoleon’s prized steed ran away. An alert private immediately jumped on a horse and chased after the great military leader’s steed. When the private returned the horse, Napoleon smiled at the private and said, “Thank you, captain.” The overjoyed private immediately took his old uniform to the quartermaster and exchanged it for a captain’s uniform. He then ran to the barracks, packed his bags, and moved into the officer’s quarters. In an instant, the commander-in-chief changed his status from a lowly private to a commissioned officer. He simply believed what the general had said and acted accordingly.

Likewise, Jesus Christ has forever changed our status before God through his bloody cross and empty tomb. In light of our new position, we can change our ways by the sovereign power of the risen Christ. That is the message of the text. Jesus Christ changes the lives of those who live with heavenly priorities. Colossians 3:1-4 lay down the requirements and reasons for living with heavenly priorities.

#### I. THE REQUIREMENTS FOR LIVING WITH HEAVENLY PRIORITIES

Colossians 3:1-2 gives two requirements for living with spiritual priorities.

##### A. SEEK THOSE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE.

Heaven is one of the neglected doctrines in the church today. And this sad indictment is a telling indicator of our spiritual health.

Verse 1 says, *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”* This verse commands believers to live in constant pursuit of heavenly things. Implicitly, it condemns the pursuit of the things of this world. This does not mean we should detach ourselves from the affairs of life. You are accountable for the time, gifts, relationships, finances, and opportunities God entrusts to you. But these personal responsibilities must not become ultimate priorities. C.S. Lewis said it well: “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither.” This is why we should not worry about physical, material, and temporal things. Matthew 6:33 says, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* When things become more important than God, you only rob yourself. The daily experience of the abundant life only happens when you live with heavenly priorities. So God’s word commands us to seek those things that are above. Note the foundation and focus of this command.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN’S HEAVENLY PURSUITS. Verse 1 says, *“If then you have been raised with Christ.”* The New Testament speaks of the believer’s resurrection in two tenses. In most instances, it is the future tense that points to our glorification when Christ returns. But here the believer’s resurrection is mentioned in the past tense: *“you have been raised with Christ.”* This statement emphasizes how vital the resurrection of Jesus is to the Christian faith. 1 Corinthians 15:14 says, *“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”* Christianity stands or falls on the historical fact and theological significance of Christ’s resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the most amazing event in history. But just as amazing is that every person who trusts in Christ shares the reality, power, and glory of his resurrection. You have been raised with Christ.

When Paul says, *“If then you have been raised...”* he is not questioning the validity of the Colossian’s salvation. Grammatically, the condition is first class, which assumes the statement is true. In fact, it is the basis of Paul’s argument in this paragraph. It could read, *“Since you have been raised with Christ.”*

Genuine spirituality is rooted in the believer's intimate union with the risen Christ. If you have not repented of your sins and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are dead in trespasses and sins. You are separated from God. You are unable to respond to God's will, which dooms you to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. But when you declared righteous by faith alone, you are raised with Christ. Your co-resurrection with Christ enables you to live with attitudes, attention, and affections that are shaped by the eternal perspective of heaven's priorities.

BECAUSE HE LIVES, I CAN FACE TOMORROW;  
BECAUSE HE LIVES, ALL FEAR IS GONE  
BECAUSE I KNOW WHO HOLDS THE FUTURE  
LIFE IS WORTH THE LIVING, BECAUSE HE LIVES

THE FOCUS OF THE CHRISTIAN'S HEAVENLY PURSUITS. What are the things above that we are to seek? What is it about heaven that makes it attractive to you? Christians look forward to heaven as a place of reward for our faithfulness to God, reunion with our believing loved-ones, and rest from the troubles of this world. All of these things will be a part of heaven's joys. But you have misunderstood what heaven is all about if your view of it goes no further than those things. The focus of the believer's heavenly pursuits is Jesus Christ himself. Verse 1 says: *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."* Christ is heaven's focus.

CHRIST IS THE SUPREME FOCUS OF HEAVEN. Paul says that heaven is where Christ is. Your passion for heaven ought not to be merely about the fact that you got a momma or daddy there. Ultimately, you ought to be passionate about the fact that you have a Savior there. In fact, if your loved-one was saved, you dishonor Christ if you spend too much time mourning their death. Psalm 16:11 says, *"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* If you deceased loved-one was in the Lord, they're presently

experiencing joy that you can't imagine. So don't mourn too much for them. Instead, make sure you're on your way to the place where Christ is. Some people wonder if heaven will be a boring place. The answer is that heaven will only be a boring place for those who deem Christ to be a boring person. But if you know, trust, love, worship, and serve Christ, heaven can't wait.

WHEN WE ALL GET TO HEAVEN,  
WHAT A DAY OF REJOICING THAT WILL BE!  
WHEN WE ALL SEE JESUS,  
WE'LL SHOUT THE VICTORY!

CHRIST IS THE SOVEREIGN FOCUS OF HEAVEN. Verse 1 says heaven is *"where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."* This statement pictures Christ in two sovereign positions. First, he's seated. Hebrews 10:11-14 teaches the superior priesthood of Christ. In the Old Testament economy, the high priest would make sacrifice for the people year after year. And he could never rest from this ongoing task. But after Christ offered himself once as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, he sat down. And he is seated right now as our all-sufficient Prophet, Priest, and King. But notice where he is seated: at the right hand of God. The right hand is the place of honor, power, and majesty. The right hand of God is the place of sovereign authority. In Psalm 110:1, David says, *"The Lord said to my Lord: 'sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"* Heaven is not just the place where Christ resides; it is where Christ reigns. So to seek those things that are above means to live in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every area of your life. Christ reigns in heaven. And if you seek those things that are above, he will reign in your life and bring to pass all of his good pleasure for your life.

#### B. SET YOUR MINDS ON THINGS ABOVE.

The Lord commands us to guide our thoughts away from some things and to certain things. Verse 2 says, *"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."* This refutes the common misconception that one's thought life cannot be controlled. You can set your mind. In fact, you do set your mind on certain things. You set your mind on raising your family, finding your mate, building your career, completing your education, learning your craft, reaching

your goals, and having your fun. So the issue is not whether you set your mind. The question is on what you choose to set your mind. Do you set your mind on the temporal things of this world? Or do you wisely set your mind on the eternal things of heaven?

Your choice is vital to your spiritual development because of the organic connection between the command to seek the things that are above and the command to set your mind on things above. Romans 12:1 says, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”* But this call to the consecrated lifestyle depends on the development of a consecrated mindset. So Romans 12:2 says, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Mark it down: You can’t have a godly life and a worldly mind at the same time. You must set your mind on things above in order to seek those things that are above. This does not mean that you must stop thinking about daily affairs of life. It means that your thinking ought to be shaped by heaven’s priorities, not the world’s agenda.

The Chicago evangelist, D.L. Moody, used to complain that too many Christians were so heavenly-minded they were no earthly good. The direct opposite is now true. Many Christians are so earthly-minded that we are no heavenly good. Is that you? Are you so busy thinking about your family, career, education, finances, and goals that the things of God have been squeezed out of your thinking? If so, you are robbing yourself of the peace of mind that only God can give. Philippians 4:9 says, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”* This is why you must not allow life to crowd God out. You’re going to need God to be with you. And the only way you can live with confidence that God’s peace is with

you is if you meditate on and practice the things that are pleasing to him.

Well, how do you set your mind on things above? Isaiah 55:8-9 says: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* God’s thoughts and ways are infinite transcendent. But we must strive to bridge the gap. Isaiah 55:10-11 tells us how: *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”* Set your mind on the things above by reading, hearing, studying, memorizing, and meditation on the Word of God. Isaiah 40:8 says: *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”*

## II. THE REASONS FOR LIVING WITH HEAVENLY PRIORITIES.

Colossians 3:3-4 gives three reasons for living with heavenly priorities.

### A. THE DEATH OF YOUR PAST LIFE

Verse 3a says, *“You have died.”* Before Christ saves you, you are spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:1 says, *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.”* But when you receive Christ, your spiritual condition is miraculously transformed. You were dead in sin. You become dead to sin. That is what Paul means when he says, *“You have died.”* Romans 6:1 records a rhetorical question about Christian living: *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”* In Romans 6:2 answers: *“By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”* Later, Romans 6:11 concludes: *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* It is said that when someone would come to the home to visit MARTIN LUTHER, the great Reformer answered the door by declaring, *“Martin Luther is dead! Jesus Christ lives here now.”* That is the testimony of every person who has received Christ as Savior and Lord. You have died. Think about the life-changing implication of this spiritual reality.

- Take a woman who is addicted to drugs, and let her die. You can all offer her all kinds of drugs. But she won't respond, because she's dead.
- Take a man who is enslaved to sexual sin, and let him die. You can offer him all kinds of illicit sex. But he won't respond, because he's dead.

In a real sense, if you have been born again, you have died to sin. Christ has canceled your past, changed your position, and conquered your problems. Therefore, you can and should live as though you were dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Galatians 6:14 gives a practical way to do that. Paul says, *"But far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."* Boast in the cross. Brag about what Jesus did for you when he shed his blood on the cross. Do not put your confidence in anything but the cross. Jeremiah 9:23 says, *"Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the might man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches.'" Boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ by which you died to sin.*

#### B. THE SECURITY OF YOUR NEW POSITION

Verse 3 says, *"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."* This affirmation of the believer's hidden life does not mean you should be a secret-agent disciple. It does not mean you should wear spiritual camouflage to hide your Christianity. You should not blend in with the wicked ways of this sinful world. Your righteous life should shine forth to God's glory. Matthew 5:16 says, *"In the same way, let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* So what does it mean that your life is hidden with Christ in God?

**THE MYSTERY OF YOUR SALVATION.** The fact that your life is hidden with Christ in God means that the unsaved people will never truly understand your devotion to Christ. They won't understand why you pursue holiness, walk by faith, love without conditions, give generously,

and reject the world's values. They won't understand why you're in church today. The Christian life is an enigma to the unsaved world. You can give personal testimonies. You can quote helpful scripture. And you can make logical arguments. But your salvation will still be a mystery. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."*

**THE SECURITY OF YOUR SALVATION.** To say that our life is hidden is to say that our salvation is safe. Our salvation is eternally secure because our life is hidden with Christ in God. In order to lose your salvation, some human force or demonic burglar would have to be able to snatch you away from Christ and out of God. And that's not possible. When the emperor threatened to take Chrysostom's life if he did not recant and renounce his faith in Christ, CHRYSOSTOM confidently replied, "You cannot, your majesty, for my life is hid with Christ in God." John 10:28-30 says, *"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* You may ask, "Can I lose my salvation?" The answer is it all depends on who saved you. If your hope of eternal life is based on your self-righteousness, good works, and sincere motives, you only have the security of a 1st class passenger on a sinking ship with no life boats. But if your hope of heaven is resting in the fact that Christ died for your sins and is the Lord of your life, you can confidently sing:

BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE;  
O WHAT A FORETASTE OF GLORY DIVINE  
HEIR OF SALVATION PURCHASED BY GOD;  
BORN OF HIS SPIRIT, WASHED IN HIS BLOOD

#### C. THE HOPE OF YOUR FUTURE GLORY

Verse 4 says, *"When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."* This verse makes three affirmations about the believer's hope of future glory.

**CHRIST IS YOUR LIFE.** If Christ has no place in your life, you are lost in your sins and on your way to hell. Likewise, if Christ only has a place in your life, you too may be lost and on your way to hell.

For those who have been born again, Christ is not just an important part of their lives. He is life itself. Galatians 2:20 declares: *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* In Philippians 1:21, Paul testifies, *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* And 1 John 5:12 says, *“Whoever has the Son has life, whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

Let me ask you a question. What is your life? What are you living for? What is it that you can't live without? Examine yourself today and determine what life for you is? Here is a helpful standard to use in your self-examination: You should only live for that which matters at dying time. Let me help you fill in some of the blanks:

- Your cash, clothes, and cars won't help you at dying time.
- Your family and friends can't help you at dying time.
- Your good looks, personal accomplishments, material possessions, advanced degrees, social standing, political affiliation, and good credit won't matter at dying time.

The only thing that will matter is whether Jesus Christ is your life. So practice that old hymn until it becomes your personal testimony:

JESUS IS ALL THE WORLD TO ME, MY LIFE, MY JOY, MY ALL  
HE IS MY STRENGTH FROM DAY TO DAY, WITHOUT HIM I  
WOULD FALL  
WHEN I AM SAD, TO HIM I GO, NO OTHER ONE CAN CHEER ME  
SO; WHEN I AM SAD, HE MAKES ME GLAD, HE'S MY FRIEND

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST. Paul says, *“When Christ who is your life appears...”* Note that Paul does not say, *“If he appears.”* Christ is coming again. We do not know the time of his coming. Matthew 25:36 says, *“But concerning, that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”* We

don't know when the lord Jesus coming again. But Christ is coming again. The Lord promised it. The angels proclaimed it. The word of God declares it. The Spirit affirms it. The signs prove it. The church believes it. The saved expect it. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says: *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord”* Jesus Christ is coming again.

THE FUTURE GLORY OF THE BELIEVER. Verse 4 says, *“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”* Your life is hidden with Christ in God. But that is just for the present time. One day, the secret will get out fully and forever. 1 John 3:2 says: *“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.”* When Christ comes again, you will share in his glory. WILLIAM BARCLAY comments: *“Someday the verdicts of eternity will reverse the verdicts of time.”* Think about it. One day...

- Every burden will be lifted.
- Every lie will be exposed.
- Every sacrifice will be rewarded.
- Every pain will be healed.
- Every tear will be wiped away.
- Every hope will be realized.
- Every promise will be fulfilled.

Andrew Bonner sent Charles Spurgeon a copy of his commentary on Leviticus. Spurgeon was so blessed by it that he returned the book with this note: “Dr. Bonner, please place herein your autograph and photograph.” Soon the book was returned with this message from the saintly Bonner: “Dear Spurgeon: Here is the book with my autograph and photograph. If you had been willing to wait a short season, you could have had a better likeness; for I shall be like Him. I shall see Him as he is.”