

Seekers

Colossians 3:1-4

Dr. Paul Cannings

A. Mindset (vs. 1):

1. You have been raised up with Christ – When Scripture teaches that we have been raised up with Christ, it means that once we accept Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit, once and for all quickens our spirit, restoring our ability to connect with God, who is a Spirit being (Romans 8:9-11). As Titus 3:4-8 explains, we were once spiritually lifeless - like a dead car battery or a house disconnected from its power source – but through salvation, we are regenerated and reconnected to divine life.
 - a) The major hortatory section of the letter begins with Paul’s reminder that the Colossians not only died with Christ in his death (2:20, cf. vv 11, 12) but they were also raised from the dead with him (2:12, συνηγέρθητε). This short paragraph of four verses also concludes the “doctrinal” section of the epistle for it rounds out what has previously been said by the apostle against the “philosophy” of the false teachers (2:8–23) presenting the true alternative to that teaching: since you have shared in Christ’s resurrection your aims, ambitions, in fact your whole outlook, are to be centered in him, in that place of highest honor where God has exalted him. Chapter 3:1–4, like the earlier short section chapter 2:6, 7, serves as an important bridge passage in the epistle, drawing together themes previously mentioned (2:11, 12, 13, 20), at the same time setting forth the theological foundation (the “indicative”) for the exhortation (the “imperative”) that follows.¹
2. You have been raised up Christ – When we are raised up with Christ, we are now able to connect with all that is spiritual about who God is. We can grow to be like Him (Gal. 2:20) and begin to understand the mind of the Lord through His Word (1 Corinthains 2:10-15). Where our prayers were once hindered (John 9:31), we now have access to God through Christ, whose abiding presence allows our prayers to be answered – even the unspoken groanings of our hearts (John 15:7-10; Romans 8:26). Because of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, who fully lives within us, our life is now eternal (John 14:16-17; Eph. 1:3-4). We have also been entrusted with spiritual gifts, which Christ will one day reward as we faithfully put them to work (1 Peter 4:7-8; 1 Cor. 3:10-15). Our spiritual viability enables us to live as overcomers (1 John 4:4; Rev. 3:21).
 - a) Since He is in a position of supreme authority, no principality or power can prevent their access to this realm and to God’s presence. They are thus to keep on aiming at that which is above and him who is at the center.
3. You have been raised up Christ – Our regeneration – our being raised up - is accomplished by the very same power that Christ experienced at the resurrection; *“and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the*

¹ O’Brien, P. T. (1982). *Colossians, Philemon* (Vol. 44, p. 159). Word, Incorporated.

righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil. 3:9-11; NASU)

4. Keep seeking the things above – Because of the power that now resides within us through Christ, believers are commanded to make it a habit to persistently strive after only those things that are eternal as defined in God’s Word. *“But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”* (Lk 12:31; NASU)
 - a) Romans 8:5-6 – *“Those who live according to their sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desire; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”*
 - b) The imperative statements indicate what the believer is to do in response to this new life in Christ:
 - He is to set his heart (or mind) on things above (vss. 1-2).
 - He is to put to death practices that belong to his earthly nature (vs. 5).
 - He is to rid himself of practices that characterized his unregenerate self (vs. 8).
 - In summary, he is called upon to become in daily experience what he is positionally in Christ (Rom. 6:1-13).
 - c) The language and thought here are reminiscent of Jesus’ exhortation to *“seek first his kingdom”* (Matt. 6:33). When Paul speaks of the “above,” he is not so much thinking literally as spiritually. He has in mind all that characterizes “the age to come,” life in the new covenant, and citizenship in heaven (see Phil. 3:20).²
5. The right hand of God – As we seek the things above, having been raised up with Christ, we position ourselves in a prominent, powerful position in the presence of God. This also helps us live with purpose.
 - a) This passage was understood by Paul and the early Christians to be a messianic promise that God’s Anointed One would be exalted to a position of prominence and authority after he defeated his enemies. Paul calls on Christians to meditate on the fact that they live in a vital connection to a sovereign Lord who has defeated his supernatural enemies—the same enemies they now face—and now sits enthroned in a position of preeminent authority.³
 - b) At Colossians 3:1 the phrase alluded to in the psalm, “seated at the right hand of God” (*ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Θεοῦ καθήμενος*) points to the centrality and supremacy of Christ in the heavenly realm. Or to put it another way the apostle alludes to the psalm in order to describe the realm above in terms of the exalted Christ. This heavenly realm centers around the one with whom they have been raised. Since he is in a position of supreme authority no principality or power can prevent their access to this realm and to God’s presence. They are thus to keep on aiming at that which is above and him who is at its center.⁴

² Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*. (Vol. 3, p. 393). Zondervan.

³ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*. (Vol. 3, p. 393). Zondervan.

⁴ O’Brien, P. T. (1982). *Colossians, Philemon* (Vol. 44, p. 163). Word, Incorporated.

6. Set your mind on things above – We are commanded to make it a continual habit to willfully and affectionately desire to do whatever God’s kingdom agenda defines for us to accomplish for His glory. This requires intentional focus. We must not allow earthly concerns, pressures or values to override what the Lord is revealing through His Word and Spirit.
 - a) The way a person thinks is intimately related to the way that person lives.
 - b) Thinking – key passages to bear in mind:
 - Proverbs 3:5-6.
 - Romans 8:5-9
 - Ephesians 4:17-21 – to not think Biblically – James 3:13-18
 - 1 Peter 1:13-16
 - Romans 8:5-6 – *“Those who live according to their sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desire; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”*
 - c) The apostle exhorts the Roman Christians not to consider themselves too highly but to think with sober judgment and in accordance with the measure of faith God has given them (Rom 12:3, note the fourfold use of φρονέω words: ὑπερφρονέω, “be haughty,” “consider oneself too highly,” σωφρονέω, “be sensible or reasonable,” “keep one’s head,” and φρονέω twice); elsewhere he admonishes his readers to “be of the same mind” (Rom 12:16; 15:5; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2; 4:2; cf. Gal 5:10; Phil 3:15), an injunction that is not intended to squash independent thinking by Christians or to prevent them from having different opinions on secondary matters, but is to exhort them to be at one in basic aim, direction and orientation of their behavior.⁵

B. Hidden Life Exposed (vs. 3):

1. You have died – When Paul declares that we have once and for all died, he means that the life we formerly lived – along with its desires, practices, and motivations that do not align with the Lord’s instructions – no longer governs us. As Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:22-24, we must lay aside the old self.
 - a) You died points back Colossians 2:20; 2:11,12; 2:16-23 – ascetic regulations.
 - b) The fullest explanation of this wonderful truth is found in Romans 6–8. Christ not only died *for* us (substitution), but we died *with* Him (identification). Christ not only died *for* sin, bearing its penalty; but He died *unto* sin, breaking its power. Because we are “in Christ” through the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), we died with Christ. This means that we can have victory over the old sin nature that wants to control us. “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:2)⁶

⁵ O’Brien, P. T. (1982). *Colossians, Philemon* (Vol. 44, p. 163). Word, Incorporated.

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 133). Victor Books.

- c) Paul's premise is that the Colossians have died with Christ (2:20); therefore trusting the finished work of Christ and living as what they are in him, rather than following human religious regulations (2:21-23), will produce holy living.⁷

2. Your life (Zoe) is hidden with Christ in God – Because we have been 'raised up with Christ' and now have the Holy Spirit fully living in us, transforming us into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Romans 12:2), our new life is concealed in Christ (because we were raised up in Christ; Eph. 2:8) while being continually sustained, nurtured and matured by the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- a) The word "life" is *zōē* (ζωή), here, the resurrection life which the saint enjoys. It is the eternal life given him as the motivating energy and directive agent of the new kind of life he lives, together with that life lived out. It is hidden with Christ in the sense that as Vincent says; "Your new spiritual life is no longer in the sphere of the earthly and sensual, but is with the life of the risen Christ, who is unseen with God." Expositors says: "*In God* asserts Christ's own union with God, and emphasizes our union with God in Him."⁸

3. Your life (Zoe) is hidden with Christ in God – To be hidden in Christ – an act that occurred at salvation and continues forever - is to be secure and protected from the accusations and attacks of Satan (Rev. 12:9-10). Because Christ is in God, our lives are doubly protected. As illustrated in the case of Job, Satan must come to Christ to get to us while Christ sits in the prominent position of the right hand of God providing us continual direct access to God and faithfully interceding on our behalf.

- a) "Hidden" implies both concealment and safety; both invisibility and security. He is not yet glorified, but he is secure and safe in Christ. In fact, Christ is his very life. Christ said He was going where "the world will not see Me anymore" (John 14:19).⁹
- b) In Psalm 27:5–6, the psalmist says, "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock." Isaiah 49:2 says, "In the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver" (see also Ps. 31:19–20).¹⁰

4. Christ who is our life – Paul teaches that Christ, the Anointed One, is our life, provides us the highest quality of life possible – the very life of God dwelling within us. The Holy Spirit fully resides in us, making our bodies His dwelling place (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Because the Holy Spirit is the Helper of Christ, His indwelling presence means that Christ Himself truly lives in us.

- a) "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 3:18). Christ is our life. Eternal life is not some heavenly substance that God imparts when we, as sinners, trust the Saviour. Eternal life is Jesus

⁷ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Col 3:1–11). InterVarsity Press.

⁸ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 6, p. 218). Eerdmans.

⁹ Geisler, N. L. (1985). *Colossians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 680). Victor Books.

¹⁰ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*. (Vol. 3, pp. 393–394). Zondervan.

Christ Himself. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hateth the Son hateth life" (John 5:12). We are dead and alive at the same time—dead to sin and alive in Christ¹¹

5. Christ who is our life – Once we are saved, Christ's life is now our life because we have been 'raised up with Christ' (vs. 1), we have 'set our minds on the things above,' (vs. 2) and whatever was a priority to us is now irrelevant when compared to what Christ is calling for us to do because we 'have died and our life is hidden with Christ who is in God.' As a result, Christ is our life.
6. Our life is revealed, manifested – Because Christ's life is now our life, an ongoing work of transformation takes place, manifesting character traits that represents the nature of Christ. Like Paul says, "*I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me.*" (Gal 2:20; NASU)
 - a) 1 John 3:2 "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."
7. Our life is revealed with Him in glory – When Paul says, '*who is our life, is revealed..*' it also means that upon the return of Christ we will also appear with Him in the full revelation of His, excellent divine nature.
 - a) "Glory" was a characteristic theme in apocalyptic thought where it was closely associated with heavenly existence as it is also in Paul's writings. The future manifestation in glory predicted here for the believer has particular reference to his sharing Christ's likeness (cf. 1 John 3:2, "we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"), and to receiving the glorious resurrection body. It was this same hope to which the apostle directed the Philippians' attention: "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (σῶμα τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ)" (Phil 3:20, 21 niv; cf. 1 Cor 15:42, 43; 2 Cor 5:1, 2).¹²
8. Our life is revealed with Him in glory – The ultimate goal of our salvation is transformation into the likeness of Christ. As Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 3:18; "*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*" (NASU) This is why Paul declares, "*We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*" (Col. 1:28-29; NASU)
9. Our life is revealed with Him in glory – When Christ saved us, it was not so that we might grasp all that this world has to offer, but that we might experience the kingdom of God today (Luke 17:20-21). This present participation of God's kingdom is designed to shape us into all that He has purposed us to be, as we live in anticipation of a full and final experience of His promises in heaven (John 14:1-4; Matthew 19:17-30).

¹¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 133). Victor Books.

¹² O'Brien, P. T. (1982). *Colossians, Philemon* (Vol. 44, pp. 167–168). Word, Incorporated.

