

THE THINGS ABOVE

Colossians 3:1-4

Intro: The work of the Lord in Colosse had been a thriving work. Paul had *not* been the one who came there first, like he did in so many other places, as a pioneer missionary to preach the Gospel. It probably was Epaphras who had heard Paul, possibly in Ephesus, and then had taken the message of salvation back to his home town of Colosse. But ever since Paul had heard of the work in Colosse, he had given thanks to the Lord for what had been done there. And he had been praying faithfully for them. See his thanksgiving in Col. 1:3-8, and his prayer for them beginning with 1:9 and going at least to verse 14, although his prayer blends into his prayer blends into some wonderful teaching in which Paul was pointing out (1) from the work of Christ in salvation, (2) from the very Person of Christ as the ultimate revelation of God, (3) from creation and the continuation of all created things, as well as (4) from the Lord's relationship to His church, that it was the purpose of God that Christ might have and maintain what is called, "the preeminence." See 1:18b.

Charles Williams, in his translation of the NT, translates "preeminence" as "that He alone should stand first in everything" (p. 444). The idea is that Christ had the preeminence in all of these areas *originally*, and it is obviously the will of God that He would have that preeminent place in all of these areas *continually*. This means that whenever we talk about salvation, or God, or creation, or the church, we must always begin and continue *with Christ*. *We must never allow anyone or anything to turn our attention away from Christ.* He always has to be first because He is first. He had been first in the hearts of the Colossians, and Paul was writing to point out that He must be kept first.

But Paul knew that there were teachers in Colosse who did not place Christ first. And this is why he wrote this epistle.

With this in mind Paul's initial exhortation to the believers in Colosse was, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him" (Col. 2:6). He meant they were to walk in fellowship with Him. They were to walk in dependence upon Him. The Lord Jesus Christ was to be preeminent in their daily living. Paul expected that the Colossians would see the reasonableness of this as well as the necessity of this, in the light of the preeminence of Christ as Paul explained it in chapter 1. But then Paul followed all of that instruction with a warning in 1:8, showing

in the verses which follow more evidence why Christ is sufficient for all that is necessary for our acceptance with God. That goes down through verse 15. And then he warned them a second time in the remaining verses of chapter 2 (16-23).

Thus the first two chapters of Paul's epistle to the Colossians are primarily *doctrinal*. The remaining two chapters are *the practical section of the epistle*.

Dr. Harry Ironside in his brief but very excellent commentary on Colossians, made what to me is a very helpful suggestion. He looks upon the warnings of chapter 2 as parenthetical, but, nevertheless, very important. And so to make the connection between chapters 1 and 2, especially chapter 2, he said that we need to go back to 2:13 which speaks of our resurrection with Christ, and then go on to chapter 3:1. The Greek, as well as Paul's thought, justifies translating the first word of chapter 3, "If," as *since*. Every believer has been raised with Christ, that is, raised when He was raised because not only was Christ's death for us, we died in Him because He died in our place, but the same is true of Christ's resurrection. We not only died in Him and with Him, but we were raised with Him. He died for our sins, and we died to our sins. But just as death now has no more dominion over our Lord (Rom. 6:9), in the same way sin no longer has dominion over us (Rom. 6:7). Christ's substitutionary death delivered us from sin's penalty, but it also delivered us from sin's power. We will always be able to sin until our bodies are redeemed, but sin is not our master. Therefore, what Paul told the Colossians to do in chapters 3 and 4, beginning with 2:6, is only possible for those who are trusting in Christ for their salvation.

So, as Dr. Ironside suggested, I will now read Col. 2:13, and then jump down to 3:1. (Read.)

As we begin to look at these verses (3:1-4) let me point out to you the three phases of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ which are referred to in them:

- 1) In verse 1, the first part of the verse, the resurrection of Christ – which as we all know is a past event.
- 2) Also in verse 1, but at the end of the verse, our Lord's present position in heaven; He "sitteth on the right hand of God." This means two things in particular. It means that God has accepted the work of Christ which He did on our behalf. And secondly it means, according to Heb. 7:25, "He

ever liveth to make intercession for us.” Both of these truths are important for us to remember.

But there is a third phase to the work of our Lord, and this is mentioned in verse 4:

3) This speaks of the future: the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our life now, but we look forward to His coming for us when we will “appear with Him in glory.” This means that we are going to be “with Him” where He has been, but when that event takes place our salvation will be complete. We will be glorified. We will be like our blessed Lord, conformed to His image, and never again able to sin.

So that all of these wonderful things that Paul had to say about us, are directly related to:

- 1) What the Lord has done for us.
- 2) What the Lord is doing for us.
- 3) What the Lord is yet to do for us.

Now do you see why false doctrine not is unable to add anything to what Christ either has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us, but what they would add will only serve to minimize the work of Christ, or turn our hearts away from Christ altogether. What can our works possibly add to the work of Christ? What can angels do for us that the Lord has not done, is doing, or will do for us? Is there anything? And what can these false teachers, these impostors whoever they may be, add to God’s Word which is already in our hands?

We need Colossians today. Our biggest danger is not in the world (although that is a danger that we need to guard ourselves against), but our greatest danger is within the church. Perhaps I should bring these two together and say that our greatest danger is the way the world has come into the church, or has been brought into the church by those who have never fully understood all that we have in Christ. It is very likely that some of the loudest voices in evangelical circles today may be coming from men and women who don’t even know the Lord. But they are making their mark upon people in the church.

Now we all need to notice that there are two things that the Apostle Paul told *all* of the believers in Colosse to do, and they have been two things that *all* believers everywhere from that day to this, should be doing.

The first is this: “Seek those things which are above.” And the second is:

“Set your affection on things above.” Let us turn our attention to these two commandments”

I. “SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE” (Col. 3:1).

What would the average person in the world think that this meant? Or how many professing Christians are there who understand these words: “Those things which are above.” Probably the best that most people could make of this is that it might have something to do with outer space. But that doesn’t make sense if we are thinking about the Colossians in the first century. Maybe some may have wondered about how to get to the moon, how to visit the planets, but it certainly would not have been a subject that everybody was thinking about. The “things which are above”? What does it mean?

Well, Paul went on to say what he meant: “where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” And by this statement Paul meant that as he was writing to the Colossian believers, that is where the Lord was, sitting “on the right hand of God.”

But where is God? Well, God is everywhere, but the Bible speaks of Him as being in heaven. The Lord told His disciples who had asked Him to teach them to pray, that they should address God this way: “Our Father, which art in heaven.” But where is heaven? We don’t know. We know that when the Lord went back to heaven He ascended from the earth. The best we can say is that it is not in our created universe.

But Paul stated here what he meant by where we could find “those things which are above.” They are where Christ is, and where God is. So the things which are above must be that which has to do with Christ, and that which has to do with God.

But someone might say, “How are we supposed to know about Christ and about God?” None of us has been to heaven yet. Most of you know the answer to that question. God has given us His own Word which is to tell us about Himself, and about His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the Bible, in books like Colossians, that God has used His servants to tell us about Himself, and about His Son, about Their character – Their perfect holiness, Their absolute sovereignty, Their infinite wisdom, Their mercy and grace, Their love, Their righteous judgments, Their will, Their immutability, Their plans and purposes – all that God wants us to know

about Himself, about His Son, and, I can add, about the Holy Spirit, has been given to us in the Bible.

Paul used this word “seek” in the second person plural and the present tense meaning that every person in the Colossian church, those who were true believers, regardless of their age or gender, were to be constantly seeking to know all that has been revealed in Scripture about the Three Members of the Godhead, and then to get acquainted with Their works, Their promises, Their purposes. If Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father, this means that what He did here on earth for our salvation has been fully accepted by God. And since the Bible tells us that the Lord’s work at the Father’s right hand now is to pray for us, we know that God is acquainted with us, that He knows our needs, and that He is presenting those needs to the Father.

So, if we are going to be seeking those things which are above, this means that you and I are to be reading and re-reading our Bible, asking the Lord to teach us by His Holy Spirit Who delights to teach us about Christ from the pages of Scripture.

But now let us go on to the second command in our text:

II. “SET YOUR AFFECTION ON THINGS ABOVE” (Col. 3:2-4).

And Paul indicated here that setting our affection upon the things above means that we will not set our affection on the things of earth. Most people live like this world is all that there is to life. And so they are always thinking about having a good time, what will give them pleasure here on earth. They think about making money. They think about earthly possessions. Some people are consumed with gaining power either in business or in politics, or both. Paul used this verb in Phil. 3:19 when he was speaking of those who were the enemies of the cross of Christ, and he said:

19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.

This is a description of the people of the world. Their interest is in the here and now, just like there was no God, no heaven to be sought nor a hell to avoid. They are thinking all of the time about “earthly things.”

But Paul also used this verb in another verse in Philippians, a well know verse, Phil. 2:5: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

And then he went on to say what the mind of Christ was.

The exhortation in Col. 3:2 is a step beyond verse 1. This means that they were to set their minds and your hearts on what they were learning about “the things above.” The truth of God was to be their passion. They were to live for eternity, not for time. They were to seek to please God, not themselves. They were to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. There is something about spending time in the Word that makes us want to be what the Lord wants us to be and to do what the Lord wants us to do. We are not to live to please ourselves, but to please God, and to glorify God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The child of God who is learning the things of God and of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, will find his heart drawn away from the things of this world and the ways of the world, and drawn toward a life of fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now there are three reasons given here as to why we are to set our affections on things above not on the things of the earth.

The first is in the command itself. We need to do it because God tells us to do it. It is true that this is Paul’s exhortation, but Paul was writing on behalf of God! So this is the will of God.

The second reason given in verse 3: lit., “For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” We died when Christ died, died to the world, its ways, and its goals. Now we can only be happy by living “with Christ in God.” What an amazing position those of us who are the people of God have in our wonderful Savior! This speaks not only of our security in God, but of the fact that our lives will be transformed as a result of our fellowship with Christ in God.

The third reason is given in verse 4. Our Lord Jesus Christ is going to come again. He is coming in fulfillment of John 14:1-3 and 1 Thess. 4:13-18. So we must not, and really cannot, waste our time in earthly pursuits. We need to be ready for the Lord Who can come at any time. And when He comes, “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1John 3:2). And the Apostle John went on to say, “And every man” (the Greek text says, *everyone*) “who has this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). What a glorious day that will be when we see our Savior face to face!

Concl: Now let me ask all of us a question. Do these words describe us and the way we are living? Have you been reading the Word this week, every day? Do you love to read it, and do you think about what you read, and do you pray that the Lord will enable you to be what the Lord wants you to be, and to do what He wants you to do, and what is most important, to think the way He wants you to think?

Or do you find the Bible boring? Can you take your Bible home today and possibly not touch it until time to go to church next Sunday? Oh, that we could all say what the writer of Psalm 119 said, "O how love I Thy Law! It is my meditation all the day."

If you are not seeking those things which are above where Christ, those things about Christ. If you are more concerned about earthly things than you are about heavenly things, it is probably an indication that you need the Savior. We all have to be involved in the world to a certain extent, but while we live in the world, we need to show by the grace of God that we do not belong to this world. May the Lord enable us more and more to seek those things which are above, and then to make them that which our hearts desire more than anything this world has to offer us each day. Then we will know what true joy is, and then we will be ready for the great and glorious day when our Lord comes.