

The Christian's Past, Present & Future
Colossians 3:1-4
December 28, 2025 | Mercy Hill Church

Big Idea: Because we have been raised with Christ, we can now pursue Christ, as we wait for His (and our) glory when Christ returns

Background/Context of Colossians

- Who wrote it?
 - Written by the Apostle Paul to the church (Christians) at Colosse.
 - Paul never met the Colossians, a church planted started by Epaphras
- To Whom?
 - Colosse was once a great city which was devastated by an earthquake (~60-61 A.D.), currently a declining city – located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey)
- When? ~60-62 AD
- Where? Written by Paul while imprisoned in Rome (also when Paul wrote Philippians, Philemon)
- Why & What? To confront and address false teachings/teachers – some form of syncretism (combination of Christian faith, Jewish faith, and pagan beliefs). The main theme of Colossians is the sufficiency of Christ and the supremacy of Christ – return to the pure gospel. Jesus + nothing = everything; everything – Jesus = nothing.

1. Our Past: Raised w/ Christ (vv.1a)

- Apostle Paul reminds the Colossians, these Christians brothers and sisters who their past.
 - Ephesians 2:6 ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
- **God's Work -- Not Ours!**
- Scripture makes it abundantly clear that our salvation, the eternal life we have, our forgiveness of sins, is not because of our accomplishments, our works, our righteousness but God's work alone – salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
 - Notice who is the one who is doing the work? We're the recipients (passive) in all this:
 - Colossians 1:21-22 ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,
 - Colossians 2:9-15 ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities^[a] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him
- **Our Union with Christ (Our Identity)**
 - The Christian's deepest identity is that they *belong to Christ and live from Christ*.

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 - As a Christian, our deepest identity is that we *belong to Christ and live from Christ*.
 - Our union with Christ is the Scripture's way of describing the deep relationship believers have (united) with Jesus as we are joined to Him by faith and that what is true about Christ becomes true for us – it's not just something Jesus did for us, but something He did with us and in us.
- Personal Example: College application interview's final question – “Is there anything else you want us to know about you?”

Transition: Knowing our past helps us to live in the present. In light of what Christ has done in the past (indicative), how are to live in the present (imperative)?

2. Our Present: Pursuing Christ (vv.1b-3)

- (cf. Rom 8:5, Mark 8:33, John 8:23)
- **Our Work-- God's Command For Us**
- Indicative => Imperative: What God has done (for us) => What we are commanded to do (for God)
 - The order is critical. In the Christian faith, our obedience does not save us or cause us to be raised with Christ. Rather, it is because we have been saved, because we have been raised with Christ, that we follow & obey Jesus.
 - Moo quote: “We are not to strive for a heavenly status, since that has already been freely given in Christ. Rather we are to make that heavenly status the guidepost for all our thinking and acting”
 - Faith without works, Salvation without sanctification, Having roots without bearing fruit
- The two commands, “seek” and “set” in the Greek tense are present & continual –ongoing, not just once. We are to continually seek and set our minds on the things above.
 - Seek – pursue, strive after, desire
 - Set your minds – dwell intently, fixate upon
- **Not Gnosticism But a Kingdom Mindset**
 - Hughes quote: “The act of seeking depends on the set of the mind”
 - Gnosticism: a diverse religious/philosophical movement (~1st-5th century) which believed that salvation was achieved only through secret knowledge (gnosis); saw the material (physical) world as evil and the immaterial (spiritual, knowledge) as good; Gnostic Christians didn't believe Jesus was fully human.
 - Apostle Paul refutes this dichotomy in Colossians 1:15-16 by emphasizing that Jesus (God) was the creator of all things – both the spiritual and the physical.

- Scripture teaches that all of creation was good, while corrupted by sin, will be restored in all its goodness. When Christ returns, new resurrected bodies, new heavens and new earth – not an obliteration of creation but a new creation.
- Romans 8:5 ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.
- “on earth” (“flesh”) vs. “things above” (“spiritual”): not geographic location or physical / spiritual but rather values
 - Contrast “earthly” values in Colossians 3:5-9 (e.g. sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, lies...) vs. “kingdom” values in Colossians 3:12-14 (e.g. compassion, kindness, humility, meekness/gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving, love...)
- Philippians 4:8-9 ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.
- 1) Focus on God & His Kingdom
 - Pao quote: “Believers are not to escape from this material world; rather, they are to focus on Christ as they live faithfully on earth: ‘It is in their corporeal body that the community should be oriented toward God’s will, and thus, as believers can acknowledge Christ to be both creator and sustainer of both the heaven and the earth’”
 - Matthew 6:33 ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...
 - Example of Peter: When Jesus revealed to His disciples how we would suffer and be rejected and killed...Peter pulled Jesus aside and began to rebuke Jesus.
 - Mark 8:33 ³³But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”
 - Garland quote: “Christians are not called to escape the world but to be obedient to God within the world...We must not overemphasize otherworldliness – not calling for spiritual escapism or encouraging believers to be always dreaming of heaven...the aim is to avoid being ensnared by the world’s lures and entanglements”
- 2) Think Eternally (Long-Term) Not Just Temporarily (Short-Term)

Transition: To fully live in the present, we need to not only remember our past but keep our future in mind

3. Our Future: Glory with Christ (vv.3-4)

● “Hidden”: Secured & Veiled - Already but Not Yet

- Secured – safe, cannot be taken away or stole, like in a vault or a treasure chest.
- Veiled – hidden, obscure, a mystery...but will be revealed!
 - Things don’t completely make sense, aren’t fully revealed – aspects of our Christian lives and faith may not seem alive, worthy, fruitful, or even make sense in the present...but in the future it will!
 - Romans 8:18-21 ¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was

subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

- 1 John 3:2 ²Beloved, 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.

- **Jesus' Return: Coming Judgment & Our Glory**

- 1 Corinthians 5:10 ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
- Not just Jesus' glory but also ours!
 - Romans 8:17-18 ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that *we may also be glorified with him.*¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.
 - Philippians 3:21 ²¹who *will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
- Wright quote: "The Christian hopes not merely for the coming of the Lord, but for the full revelation of what he or she already is. Then will it be seen with what faithful diligence and perseverance many outwardly 'unsuccessful' and forgotten Christian workers have served their Lord. Paul, the Gentile traitor to the Jews, will be seen as Paul the apostle, the servant of the King. The Colossians, insignificant ex-pagans from a third-rate country town, will be seen in a glory which, if it were now to appear, one might be tempted to worship. This is how they are to regard their life, and on this foundation they are to build a genuine holiness and Christian maturity."

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Reflection Questions

- As 2025 comes to an end, how would you describe how this past year has been for you? What are some of the highs & lows, good & bad, praiseworthy and heartbreakingly for you this past year?
- How have you grown (or perhaps struggled) in the areas of faith, community, and mission this past year?
- What are some areas where you need to acknowledge, confess and repent of sin before the Lord and others?
- As you look ahead to 2026, what are some changes or adjustments you need to make?
 - What are some possible areas of growth in the areas of faith, community and mission?
- How does this morning's passage help guide you in your plans, priorities and focus for 2026?
- What are some specific areas where you need to be seeking and setting your mind (and heart) on, "the things above"?
- Parent Corner: What are some ways you can help your child(ren) keep eternity in mind while helping them to live in the present? What are ways you can be a better example to them in this way yourself?