

Colossians

Focus

Colossians 3:1-4

September 25, 2022

HDBC

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul wrote *Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

When a person becomes a Christian there is an exchange that takes place. The old dies, and is left behind and the believer enjoys a fresh new beginning.

No longer are we under the bondage & burden of sin. We have been set free. No longer are we living in spiritual darkness and death. We are spiritually alive. No longer are we on our way to Hell, but on our way to Heaven.
When you come to Christ, things change.

In His letter to the Colossians, Paul wrote of this newness. In the first two chapters he dealt mostly with theological realities of our new life in Christ. Simply put, the first few chapters are heavy on theological truth. He lays out for us our position with God; our standing with God; our relationship with God.

Now in the latter half of the book he moves to explaining how our new life in Christ changes how we think, how we live and how interact with others. In other words, he moves to offering practical applications that result from our salvation. This seems to have been the pattern for most of Paul's letters. Certainly true of Ephesians, Philippians, Corinthians, Romans.

In Paul's mind there is a direct correlation between spiritual truth (theology) and real living. Spiritual truth will impact real life. If your conversion experience did not change how you lived, it is probably that you were not really saved.

In this chapter Paul offers instruction on how to live for Christ.

- 1-4 He tells us what to **think about**.
- 5-11 He points out some **distractions to avoid**.
- 12-14 He offers a list of **virtues that we are to put on**.
- 15-17 He reveals the **primary motive for our actions**.

This morning, we will look only at verses 1-4. Our **point of focus** is critical.

1. The Reality (1a)

If denotes reality, as in 2:20. It is better translated **since**. Believers have been raised up with Christ. This is an established fact. The word actually means “to be co-resurrected.” When you were saved you were fully identified with Christ.

Now, there are various levels of identification.

I identify with all other males in the sense that I'm male.

I identify with all those who graduated H.S. in 1975.

Sometimes I identify with total strangers when I happened to be with them.

Christian author John White tells the story of his days as a medical student. For one of his classes, he missed a practicum about venereal disease and had to make it up at the clinic. When he arrived at the clinic he ended up in a line with a bunch of patients who had actually contracted a venereal disease. White barged up to the front and told the head nurse, "I need to see the doctor."

"That's what everybody says," snorted the nurse, "now get in line."

"But I'm a medical student."

"Big deal," said the nurse, "You got it the same way as everybody else; now you can stand in line like everybody else."

He eventually was able to explain that he did not have a V.D. But for a few moments he was identified with others, as if he did.

That's certainly a very casual and loose level of identification. Our identification with Christ goes much deeper than any of these. It started with Jesus identifying with us through the incarnation. He did not simply look like us or stand in line with us, He became one of us. He experienced what we experience, including death.

It is on that same deep level that we identify with Him when we are born again. It is not a superficial identification, but one that goes deep,

particularly when it comes to His death and resurrection.

You identified with his death in that you died to your old way of life. **See Col. 3:3.** You identified with His resurrection in that you were born again, given a new life, a new start. That's what baptism pictures. It pictures our identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection.

This is not something we work for or seek to achieve. It is an established fact. It already is the reality. Listen to Paul's words in Galatians 2:30.

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 delivered Himself up for me.

Back to Colossians. Because we *have been raised up* with Christ, we have a responsibility to live new lives and that begins with a **new focus**.

2. The Challenge (1b-2)

Keep seeking the things above . . . Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

In the pagan world in which Paul lived and wrote, there was little connection between a person's worship and his morality. People could bow before their idols, offer a sacrifice, and then live anyway that they wanted.

The Christian faith brought a whole new perspective on this. **Keep seeking** is in the present tense and indicates that we are to keep seeking. This is not a one-time thing. We are to be preoccupied with the eternal realities that are ours through Christ.

This is another way of saying *Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.*

Paul is not advocating some kind of mysticism where we are trying to contact the dead or enter into some mystical spirit realm. He is pointing out that our spiritual identification with Christ should govern our earthly actions, attitudes and priorities. Because we are **in Christ** and He is **in us** our focus is not on the things of this life but on the kingdom of God.

There is a positive and negative part to our responsibility.

POSITIVELY, we are to seek the things above, where Christ is.

The *things above* refers to the heavenly realm and specifically refers to the **spiritual values that characterize Christ**, such as tenderness, kindness, patience, purity, etc.

How do we do this? It starts in the mind. Paul says to set your minds on the things above. The word could simply be translated **think**. Once again the present tense indicates continual action. Lightfoot says this means that we must not only seek heaven, but we must think heaven.

Paul understood that what we think has a great impact on how we act. if we are to act like saved people, we must think like saved people. If we want the kingdom to be the priority of our lives, it must be the priority of our minds.

As the needle on a compass orients itself north, so we must orient ourselves toward Christ. And that starts in our minds.

NEGATIVELY, we are told to not set our minds on the things that are on earth. We have grown up accustomed to focusing our attention on the stuff of this world. Money, houses, cars, things. These may be necessary things are not to be at the top of our list. They are not to be our focus. You've probably heard Jack Benny's fictional account of . . .

. . . walking along when suddenly an armed robber approached and said, "Your money or your life!" There was a long pause as Benny did nothing. The robber impatiently cried, "Well?" Jack Benny replied, "Don't rush me! I'm thinking about it." Too many believe money and things are their life.

Poster showing coffin with pallbearers and the deceased' possessions: his mansion, his helicopter, nine cars, including a Porsche, Rolls, Ferrari, etc. The caption said, "He who dies with the most toys wins." How incredibly naïve and foolish is that! For way too many people, this is their philosophy of life. Sadly, many in the church are not far behind.

3. The Focus (3:1c)

Where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God

The focus is not on the place but on the person. The believer's focus is none other than the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; the risen and glorified Christ. He is described as seated at the right hand of God. More than a physical location, this is a place of honor and majesty. The Bible speaks often of Christ's exalted position.

Jesus told his accusers that *from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.* Luke 22:69

In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter told the crowd that Jesus had been *exalted to the right hand of God.* Acts 2:33

As he was being martyred, Stephen cried out, *Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.* Acts 7:56

Paul describes Jesus as *He who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.* Romans 8:34

My Greek professor, Dr. Rick Melick sums it up well.

This command called the Colossians to focus on matters related to the rule of Christ in the world. Since he is the sovereign one, his concerns should occupy the Christian . . . Believers' values and loves were to be focused on the rule of Christ, and consecrated energies were to be devoted to making that rule a reality on earth.

4. The Revealing (3:3-4)

Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Three things that this means.

First, we share a common life with Jesus. Our eternal life comes from our identification and connection to the life of Christ. *The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.* 1 Corinthians 6:17

Second, this new life is hidden in that it is concealed from the world.

Unbelievers are unable to grasp the full meaning of the believer's new life. It is not readily obvious or understandable to them.

Third, believers are eternally secure, hidden protectively from all spiritual foes. No demon can break through the protective covering of Christ and the Father.

Though the world may not now recognize those whose lives are hidden with Christ in God, that will not always be the case. When Christ is revealed at His second coming, we also will be revealed with Him in glory.

This is a call for a new way of living. True salvation changes how we live.

Warren Wiersbe wrote ***It does little good if Christians declare and defend the truth, but fail to demonstrate it in their lives.***

The change in how we live begins with a change in focus. So, where is your focus today? Wrong focus leads to wrong actions. A misplaced focus leads to a misdirected life.

Golf immortal Arnold Palmer recalls a lesson about overconfidence: It was the final hole of the 1961 Masters tournament, and I had a one-stroke lead and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. I felt I was in pretty good shape. As I approached my ball, I saw an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. He motioned me over, stuck out his hand and said, "Congratulations." I took his hand and shook it, but as soon as I did, **I knew I had lost my focus.**

On my next two shots, I hit the ball into a sand trap, then put it over the edge of the green. I missed a putt and lost the Masters. You don't forget a mistake like that; you just learn from it and become determined that you will never do that again. I haven't in the 30 years since.

Don't lose your focus.

If you have lost your focus, you can redirect it. This is a call to do so.