

Gospel Life
Colossians 3:1-4

Intro:

- **We are now at one of those transition points in the letter to the Colossian church.** The Spirit of God has been speaking through the Apostle Paul and giving him the message to give to the Colossian church. For two chapters Paul has been laying a theological foundation that will instruct the Colossian believers on how they should live. In other words, before Paul told them how to live he told the why they should live this way. In Galatians, Paul called it living in line with the gospel or for our sermon today: Gospel Life.
- **Here is why what Paul said is important.** When you read the Bible most people have two things jump out at them very quickly.

The Bible will say some things about who you are. There is a lot of language in the Bible about the identity of God's people. The Bible will call us saints, God's chosen people, the children of God and in Colossians, it calls us *faithful brothers (sisters)*. There is lots of language about who you are.

The other thing many people find is that the Bible tells us things to do. The Bible is full of moral exhortations, ethical instructions and commandments. The Ten Commandments come to people's minds and they are immediately faced with things they are supposed to do or not do. It is hard to read the Bible and not learn about things you are supposed to do.

- **So the question is: What is the connection between who you are and what we are supposed to do?**
 - This is a very important question because if you get this connection wrong you will live the Christian life backwards. Your Christians life will be jacked up. Your understanding of the Bible will be entirely wrong. You will think the Bible is simply a rulebook and being a Christian is about keeping those rules.¹
 - So . . . if you get this understanding correct you will get the gospel, love the gospel and continue on in gospel growth. You will enjoy and magnify the grace of God given in Christ. You will love the glory of God and the holiness of God. Everything you do, every command you keep will be out of love because you understand your identity in Christ and your desire will be to please God and you will know what to do when you don't desire God.

Main Point: Who you are determines what you do.

Let me show you what I mean. Look at the text . . .

- **Walk through the "if you" and "in Christ"/"with Christ" phrases** to help people see the connection between who we are and being in Christ.
- **Walk through the text phrase by phrase and ask:** *Is this "who you are?" or "what you do?"*
- **You see who you are in Christ or your union with Christ is your new identity in Christ.** Now to have a new identity in Christ is not like witness protection program. You still have the same memories, same embarrassing high school photo, same address, same driver's licenses photo and job but you are *"in Christ"*. And by being *in Christ* you have been given new life, new hope and new desires. Although we have been made *new in Christ*, many of us still have the same old struggles but the difference is we now want to turn from those old ways and sin and to Jesus and become obedient to Him.

¹ I want to give credit to Tim Keller and Bob Thune for how they worked these verses in order to help Christians see how they are to live out of their gospel-identity. Thune, in particular, took the abstract concepts in these verses helped me to think about them in ways to make practical application. Also F. F. Bruce, Sam Storms and Doug Moo were particularly helpful as well. May the Lord continue to bless the church with men who faithfully teach God's word.

- **It is important to have a correct understanding of the connection between who we are and what we do.** Jonathan and Eric will be preaching the next two Sunday while I am gone to Oman and they will be teaching on living a life of obedience that flows out of gospel life and so we need to have a correct understanding of how *who we are determines what we do*.
- **Verses 1 & 2 give us two commands that are really the same command.**
 - **Verse 1** says to: *seek the things above* or your translation may say *set your heart on things above*
 - **Verse 2** says to: *set your mind on things above*
 - The command is really a single command to *set your heart and mind on the things above*.
 - This command sets the trajectory for the rest of the letter.
 - **However, the command in vv. 1-2 is hard for us to do.** It is not natural for us to set our minds on things above. However, because we have died with Christ and been raised with Christ there is something new and different about us that we now desire to set our minds on things above and when we do not do that we feel conviction of sin and guilty.
- **Before we look at seeking things above I want to ask: what are things above and what are things below?**
 - Things above and things below are like worldviews or the thinking that just comes naturally for us.
 - **Illst: Sam Storms explains them this way in his book *The Hope of Glory*, "When Paul refers to things below or things on the earth, he has in mind that worldly system under the dominion of Satan, those values and goals and principles that conflict with the revelation of God in Scripture. 'Things on the earth' are whatever is driven by pride, greed, lust, and disregard for the glory of God. 'Things above,' on the other hand, are whatever reflects the beauty of Christ, whether that be the changing of a diaper, sharing a meal with friends, or celebration the Eucharist."²**
 - **Now listen to how Scripture explains our natural tendency to set our minds on things below.**
 - **James 3:14-15,** "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ ***This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.***"
 - **Philippians 3:18-19,** "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ ***Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.***"
 - These are characteristics of the natural man that still resides in us and he needs to continually die. So we need to be continually putting off the old man and putting on the new.
 - **Why is it so difficult for us to set our minds on things above?**
 - **I think there are several reasons it is difficult for us.** Let me identify some of these triggers because this will help us begin to make changes and help us progress in setting our minds on things above.
 - **We just naturally conform to the standards and practices of the world.** It is easy to be unspiritual, prideful, driven by greed, anxiety and anger. We just naturally get consumed by these things of the world and set our minds on them. When we respond, "Well that's just the way I am." You are exactly right—that is how you are.
 - **We are lazy creatures of habit.** It is not convenient to set our hearts and minds on things above. It is a big change in our routine and behavior and we love the path of least resistance. We are like the deer that travels the same worn path each day until a hunter finds the path and kills the deer.

² Sam Storms, *The Hope of Glory*, p. 216.

- **It is uncomfortable to set our minds on things above.** Let's get real. When you are talking with someone it is easy to talk about sports, TV shows, movies and current events. We do not mind making this kind of chitchat. However, it can make us uncomfortable for us to move the conversation to *things above* (*spiritual things*).

So if the question is "What did you do last night?" We are not as comfortable saying, "Well I met with some friends in our small group and we discussed life and the Bible. Then we prayed for one another." This is not a natural conversation for us and it works against setting our minds on things above.

- **So what do we need to do to help us grow in setting our minds on things above and then live accordingly? [Three things according to this text]**
 1. **Set your mind on your new life in Christ (identity, who you are in Christ).**
 2. **Set your mind on your security in Christ (your life is hidden in Christ).**
 3. **Set your mind on your destination (heaven, you will appear with Him in glory).**

I. **Set your mind on your new life in Christ (vv. 1-2)**

- **"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."**
- **If you have been raised with Christ continually seek and set your heart and mind on things above.**
- **These verses command us to constantly call ourselves back to setting our hearts and minds on things above.** The Greek word for *seek and set* in vv. 1 & 2 mean to continually keep seeking and keep re-setting our minds on the things of God.
- **Illst:** Paul said this because our minds are constantly distracted from the things of God. I don't know about you but my heart and mind are prone to wander. Even in my prayer times my mind wanders.
 - **I have learned if I am going to pray I don't need to take my phone with me.** Someone will text, I will get a reminder or I just pick it up unconsciously and begin to check things. The next thing I know I have wasted 5 to 10 minutes. Setting my mind on things above here means to turn it off and turn to the word of God and prayer.
 - **But I don't have to have a cell phone to be distracted.** The world, my flesh and the devil are fighting against us. I have had some of the worst thoughts in my prayer time. Here I am hoping to be connected to the Lord but my mind is drifting to all kinds of thoughts. I have to reset my heart and mind. Confess it and call out to the Lord for help when I get distracted.
 - **The command is to seek the things above.** This is a matter of the heart and will. It is not *let go and let God*. It means we make decisions to be obedient. I am not talking about will power but the Spirit's power working in us. It means to do what needs to be done in order to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order to have our hearts and minds further transformed by the word of God and conform our lives to the image of Christ by the grace of God.
- **Let's consider some areas where the gospel calls us to seek the things above:**
 - **We should seek to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).** This means at every opportunity given we seek to do good instead of evil. It does not mean that evil had to be done to you to overcome evil it might be just discovering a way to love that person who is hard to love or serve that person who is constantly being mean to you. It might mean finding that overlooked person and giving them attention. Finding the marginalized person or neighbor or even an enemy and showing them the kindness that Christ has shown you.

- **Seeking the things above means to walk by the Spirit and not gratify the cravings of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).** Perhaps this means that instead of putting yourself in a situation where you could sin you instead flee temptation.
- **Seeking the things above means being proactive in retraining your mind** in the ways of God through Bible study, discipleship, prayer, evangelism and worship. Do not avoid these means of grace that are rooted in the person and work of Christ in order to shape our hearts in the things above.
- **One final application on setting our minds on things above.** We live a large part of our lives in our minds. Paul Tripp says it this way: *"No one talks to you as much as you do."* So in our minds we are having these conversations with ourselves that deal with **anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, unforgiveness, and lust.** The list is endless. How does the gospel help us set our minds on things above so that we obey? **The gospel will:**

Confront how you think or feel

Convict you of sin (It will cause you to ask, "Is this something of which I need to repent?")

Comfort you with the grace of God

Challenge you in the Jesus loves you so much He will not allow you to stay the way you are.

Now let's apply it with some examples:

- **Let's say you are frustrated and angry because life is not going your way. For example:**
 - Your angry because your kids didn't get the teacher you wanted them to have at school
 - Your angry with your kids because they misbehaving and being disobedient
 - People not noticing you at work or ignoring you and you are not getting the recognition you crave
 - You are overlooked for a promotion at work
 - Your bills are piling up and you can't get ahead
 - People are not accommodating toward you and perhaps they exclude you or are antagonistic toward you at work
 - **The gospel wants to confront your mindset and your attitude** that you believe things should go your way and when they don't you are hurt or angry or sad.
 - **It calls us to consider Jesus . . . did things go His way?** Was it His fault He was crucified? No . . . He was the only innocent person in the history of the world yet He was tried and convicted and condemned and crucified as a criminal.
 - **How did He go to the cross?** Kicking and screaming? Complaining? Dragging His feet? Bickering about things not going His way? No . . . He went silently as a Lamb led to the slaughter. People spit on Him, hit Him and mocked Him and He said nothing in return except Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.
 - **The gospel wants to confront and convict us of how we respond when things do not go our way.** The gospel will give us **comfort** when we remember how our Savior responded to injustice. The gospel **challenges** us to stop making our lives about the little things going our way and instead opens up our gaze to the joy set before us in the consummation/restoration of all things so that our joy might be in that.

II. Set you mind on your security in Christ

- **Listen to v. 3:** *"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."*
- **The idea of our lives been *hidden with Christ in God* has a twofold meaning.**

- **First it is the idea that is that the source of our strength is hidden but it will be revealed.** The fact is that the world may not know that your strength comes from your identity in Christ but that does not matter. You and I know who we are in Christ and need to live out of that identity.
 - **Illst:** People may not understand how you are able to respond to suffering, tragedy, conflict and struggles with grace and peace. You may be a mystery to them and how you see life from God's perspective. It is not that you are trying to hide it from them because you want them to know Christ and enjoy Him but they may just not be able to see it . . . yet. Hopefully and prayerfully one day you witness to the grace of Christ will lead them to see Christ and trust Him.
 - **Illst: Christians are like trees planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season and out.** Our roots go deep into the soil of the grace and truth of God. We weather the storms and the winds but because we are rooted in Christ we are secure and that security gives off the aroma of life.
 - *Main point: We do what we do because we are who we are.*
- **Second, the truth about how we are hidden with Christ points to how we are secure.** Our salvation is secure. Colossians is driving this point home. Earlier in the letter Paul used the phrase *Christ in you is the hope of glory* and now he says *we are hidden in Christ*. The Holy Spirit driving the truth deep in our hearts. We are secure in Christ. **Jesus said it this way,** "*no one will snatch [my sheep] 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 my Father's hand.*" Our security is in His indestructible life.

- **When we think about our hidden life in Christ it is grounded in strength and security of Christ's life.** As Christ lived His life publically and called people to repent of their sins and to believe in Him not many believed who He said He was. Even His closest friends did not understand. He was despised and rejected, beaten, spit up on and nailed to a cross. He hardly looked like the Son of God. He hardly looked divine but this life was hidden.

Then that which was hidden was revealed in Jesus' resurrection from the dead and all was understood. Jesus was the Son of God sent to redeem His people from their sin. The hidden life of God that was in Christ was revealed when Jesus overcame sin and death through His resurrection from the dead.

- Sometimes we have a hard time understanding and applying our identity in Christ because it is hidden. There are days when we just do not believe we can be a saint, a child of God and that He loves us. It is in those times we must apply the gospel and by faith we are who God says we are.
- *We do what we do because we are who God says we are in Christ.*

III. Set your mind on your destination.

- **Verse 4:** "*When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*"
- **Verse 4:** Set your mind on your destination—heaven.
- **Verse 4 is probably the verse I struggle with the most.** No . . . not that I struggle to believe it but it is that I struggle to apply it to my life. Perhaps you are like me and do not do well in keeping your mind set on heaven. I should not struggle so much because I am able to apply a similar concept in other parts of my life.
- **Illst: Think of going on a vacation or a trip.**
 - Does anyone still have a vacation coming up?

- What do you do when you have a big trip like our trip to Oman? You begin to think about it. What if we planned to go to Oman but we never thought about our trip at all? We would not prepare as a matter of fact we would live as if we were never going to Oman.

The same is true for you if you go on a vacation. You start planning, you make decisions, you look ahead, and you pack the most important things you will need.

- *You see your destination shapes how you live.*
- What we have in v. 4 is fulfillment of the Redemptive Narrative that runs throughout all of Scripture. **Verse 4** points to the consummation/restoration of all things. It is the fulfillment of God's plan to restore to God's people what was broken by the Fall—our separation from the presence of God physically and the restoration of the perfected image of God in us. When Christ is revealed and we appear with Him (presence) we will share in the (perfected) image of God in us. So v. 4 points to the fulfillment of the Redemptive Narrative.
- **Here is our problem. Often we struggle with our identity in Christ because we live by the wrong narrative.** We forget who we are and fail to keep focused on our destination as a child of God. You see if you know what your destination is it gives you a reference point for life. We will appear with Him in glory so what this means is that is who I am and that should shape how I live.
- **How should this shape how we live?**
 - Living according to God's Redemptive Narrative and knowing that our destination is secure in Christ means that we should be the freest people in the world. This means when it comes to doing hard things and taking risks for the sake of the gospel, it is not really a risk at all because I know my destination and I am focused on it like a laser. I am not saying be foolish but if you listen to the world give you advice on how to live it will call living your life for Christ foolish. Instead live in gospel-community with a local church, keep your eyes on your destination and live freely for the sake of the gospel.
 - Move forward with the adoption you have been thinking about.
 - Become foster parents in order to serve those who are most needy.
 - Find a way to serve that person who is hard to love.
 - Go on that mission trip to that hard place.
 - Be generous with your money. If you cannot go then send someone else.
 - Answer that call to ministry or missions—go preach the gospel, serve the poor and needy, help the widow and orphan in the name of Jesus.
 - Aim your life at heaven and you will hit it. You cannot aim at the world and expect to hit heaven.
 - **Do you know what a lost world needs to see?** It needs to see us living according to a different narrative than the rest of the world. We need to understand the Redemptive Narrative of Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration in order to help our lost friends and family members find new life in Christ. Everyone lives according to some narrative. Are you able to help others see the ultimate reality of God's narrative, the true story of life and find life in Christ? How can you do this? You and I must seek the things above with all of our heart, soul and mind and set our minds on it to know it, understand it and love it. It is process of intentionally making changes in how we live in order to have our minds transformed by the word of God.
- **The question is: What narrative are you living according to?**

Conclusion

- **Illst: Have you ever heard the saying, “He is so heavenly minded he is no earthly good.”** The saying is not true. The problem is we do not have enough heavenly-minded people. People who have set their minds on things above. People who live by the narrative that their lives are hidden with Christ in God and when Christ appears we will appear with Him. This is ultimate reality. This is the narrative we need to live by.
- **The problem is we do not live by this narrative.** There is only One who has—Jesus Christ! We have One who said:
 - *“It is my food and my nourishment to do the will of Him who sent Me.”*
 - Jesus said He did nothing of His own accord but always did what the Father wanted Him to do.
 - *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” (Luke 4:43)*
 - *“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” (John 12:27-28)*
 - Because He set His mind on things above He is able to forgive us when we fail and then by His Spirit in us give us the ability to reset our minds on things above and begin again to seek the things above.
 - **Hebrews 12:1-2**, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*
- **Main point:** *We do what we do because we are who we are.*
- **Time of Silence and Reflection** on the Sermon
- **Sending Out of the Church:**
 - **Song:** *Be Thou My Vision*
 - **Blessing:**
*Now may the Lord of peace Himself
Give you peace at all times in all ways.
The Lord be with you all.*
Thessalonians 3:16 RSV