



# COLOSSIANS

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## **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Colossians 3:2**

Paul now builds upon the words of the previous verse. He just said, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." Because of this, he implores those in Colossae (and thus us!) to "set your mind on things above."

The Greek word translated as "set your mind" is an interesting one. It is *phronéō*. This in turn comes from *phrén*, which is the midriff or diaphragm; the parts around the heart. Thus it carries the idea of regulating from within, as in an inner perspective which then is displayed in an outward behavior. This may seem difficult to grasp because it combines the visceral organs with cognitive aspects of thinking, but we do this with other body parts quite often. If we say, "my heart will be with you," we are simply using the heart instead of these other organs to show where our affections are.

Paul is exhorting his readers to have their thoughts directed to heavenly things instead of those "things on the earth." We have died to the things of the world, and so our hearts should be oriented to where we have been raised to instead. As the scholar Lightfoot says, "You must not only seek heaven; you must think heaven."

Life application: Do not let the world drag you out of your heavenly home. If you have been raised with Christ, then live for Christ.

## **For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3**

"For you died" is correct. Some older versions say, "For you are dead." Without an accompanying explanation, that makes no sense. A dead person cannot read or respond to a letter. But for someone who has died, there can be the possibility of something new involved in that dying. The verb is in the aorist tense, and it denotes "death accomplished." This is what Paul is now conveying. It builds upon what he said in Colossians 2:20 –

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world,”

There was a death “to the basic principles of the world which now results in something new. Paul explains that with the words, “and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Jesus literally died. As the fulfillment of the law, the law died with Him. It was nailed to the cross (verse 2:14). But we also died with Him to the law. In His resurrection (a literal, bodily resurrection), our lives are now hidden with Him in God. The word “hid” is in the perfect tense. It is hidden once and forever. Thus the “life” is a continuous fact. In essence, “Your life was hidden, it is hidden, and it will remain hidden forever.” There is assurance in the salvation of Jesus Christ, not doubt.

As Jesus said in Matthew 22:32, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” As we spiritually died to the basic principles of the world, the world has no dominion over us. But as we are alive to Christ, we are hidden with Christ in God. In other words, we are spiritually alive, and we are kept safe in Christ – who can never die again – and therefore, we are eternally alive with Him in this mystical union which is “in God.” As Christ is eternally in the Father, and as we are eternally in Christ, we are thus eternally in God. The fellowship is complete, and it is eternal.

Life application: Words have meaning. Paul writes in specific tenses in order to fully explain what has occurred for the believer in Christ. There is to be no doubt concerning our continued salvation. When we err, let us speak to the Lord about it and move on. He has saved us, and we are saved. Hallelujah to Christ Jesus who has delivered us from the body of death, which is the law!

**When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.**

Colossians 3:4

This concluding thought of the section corresponds very closely to the closing thought of the corresponding section found in Philippians. In Philippians 3:21 it says -

“...who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body...”

Paul is careful to remind his audience that our living for heaven now is not a futile endeavor, but it is an anticipatory state of that which lies ahead. As we are destined for glory, we are reminded how important it is to set our minds on things above now. Anything which detracts from our full and focused attention on what we already possess through the work of Christ will lead to a loss of rewards when our glorified state is realized. And so he says, “When Christ *who is our life* appears.” It is not that our life is with Christ; but rather it is that Christ is our life. This is confirmed by the words of John 1:4 -

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“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

Christ was manifested in the flesh and completed His work. Upon completion of that, He ascended into heaven where we await his coming again. He will manifest Himself again at a specific time, known but to God, and when that time comes then His redeemed “will appear with Him in glory.” The day is yet ahead, the circumstances of what will occur on that day are partially referred to elsewhere, but what we shall be like on that day is not known. Paul tells us this in 1 Corinthians 15, and John tells us this as well –

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” 1 John 3:2

As a point of doctrine: Paul tells us that Christ will appear (literally “shall be manifested”). This verse presupposes the thought that there is one specific time that He will come and manifest Himself to His people, not before. Therefore, it is not only unwise, but it is against the words of Scripture to accept any supposed vision of Christ before that day. Dreams of visits to heaven (or hell), visions of Jesus, etc. are to be rejected.

Life application: As we are set on a heavenly course which is guaranteed to come about, should we not endeavor to live as if this is so now? Let us not spend our time foolishly, but instead let us set our minds on things above, and live lives which are pleasing to God, just as we will be when we are forever glorified.

**Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.** Colossians 3:5

Paul begins this verse with “Therefore” in order for the reader to consider what he has just said. He has been speaking of our state in Christ. We died with Him and we were raised with Him. And so what does that mean for us when He appears in glory? We too shall appear with Him in glory. Because of this, he will now tell us what we should abstain from in verses 5-9. Then he will relay positive things that we should strive to do in verses 10-16. In these, we will put off the old man, and we will in turn put on the new man.

In order to put off the old man, he says to “put to death your members which are on the earth.” The word is *nekroó*, and it means “to view as a corpse,” and thus “to regard as dead.” We are to look at our bodily members as if they are dead, and then he lists those members. To be noted is that he makes no distinction between the bodily members, and what they accomplish. In other words, “fornication” is listed first as if it is a bodily member. The part of the body is being equated directly with the negative act it can commit. However, the same body parts that are listed can be used in a positive way as well, and so we are being given

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insights into how we are to conduct ourselves while still in this physical, corrupt body. We are to treat it as if it is already glorified.

As noted, the list begins with fornication. Fornication is sexual intimacy which is outside of the bonds of marriage.

Next is “uncleanness.” This is a general reference to life’s impurities, and anything that a man could pursue which would otherwise defile himself.

He then lists “passion.” This indicates strong emotions which are not directed by God, such as consuming lust.

After that are “evil desires.” Such desires are reflected in things like lewdness and the working of all uncleanness and greediness.

Coming next is “covetousness.” This is closely associated with fornication and uncleanness. It indicates a desire for more and more. It demonstrates eyes that are never satisfied with what they have, and an attitude which is insatiable towards self-gratification. Paul then explains covetousness by saying “which is idolatry.” The reason covetousness is described this way is because it dethrones the Lord from our hearts and souls. Instead, we take what our attention is directed to and place it upon a throne of our heart’s making.

Life application: In the Old Testament, as forbidden actions were given there was an accompanying penalty which was noted for the offense. Such is not the case in the New Testament. We have died to the law through Christ’s death. Therefore, our penalty is something that will be realized less in this earthly life than it will be in the next. A believer’s salvation is secured, but our rewards are based on the lives we live after that salvation. However, this doesn’t mean we won’t also suffer in this life if we do bad things. We may profit from a greedy heart by making millions, but we may also lose by getting fired from our job. Paul’s point is not what will happen in this life though, but in what will be reckoned to us in the next. Therefore, let us pursue Christ now, being obedient to the admonitions and exhortations we are provided with.

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