

The Superiority of Christ The Path of the Gospel Colossians 3:1-4

Introduction

Paul writes to the Colossian Christians to guide them toward spiritual maturity (1:28). His goal is to help believers develop a lifestyle of love for God and other people and a practical guide for walking the gospel road. He counsels the Colossians to avoid religious practices that will lead a person away from genuine spiritual maturity (2:16-23).

In Chapter 2, Paul warns the Colossians about the dangers of ritualism, mysticism, and legalism. To mature spiritually, you must be able to identify false religious practices, resist those who advocate them, and root them out of your own life.

Now in 3:1-17, Paul explains the proper path to spiritual maturity and the abundant life found in the gospel. It is a path that may seem impractical and even counter-intuitive in the natural, but it unleashes God's power to radically transform our lives (3:11).

Let's read verses 1-4, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Col 3:1-4 NKJV)

I. Seek the Things Which Are Above

Paul says "the things which are above" are crucially important. What are these things? They don't refer to material things – the sky, sun, moon, stars, etc. They refer to the things that originate from God.

Specifically, they are the things God says about who Jesus is and what He has provided for us through Jesus. They include the fact that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ) who has conquered death and has full authority (3:1b). They also include the fact that those who belong to Jesus have been given spiritual life and are fully provided for through Jesus' death on the cross (3:3). We have complete forgiveness, deliverance from sin's authority, and authority over demonic domination (2:10-15).

The message of the gospel is that God gives you all this the moment you receive Christ. The gospel also includes the promise that we will reign forever with Christ when He returns at the end of the age (3:4).

These are the "things" that are true and real. They are "hidden" now – not known by physical sight, but by revelation from God's Word. 1 Corinthians 2:12 says,

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." (1Co 2:12 NKJV)

One day all of these hidden truths will be evident to all. By contrast, there are also "the things that are on earth." What are those things? He isn't referring to material things like trees, mountains, oceans, animals, other people, etc.

The "things that are on earth" refers to the religious and philosophical ideas that don't originate from God. They are the thoughts and ideas that originate from fallen humans and deceiving spirits. Remember what Paul said in 2:8, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." (Col 2:8 NKJV)

They are the things that contradict what God says about who Jesus is and what He has provided for us. In verse 23, Paul says, "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Col 2:23 NKJV)

He is referring to the lie that self-indulgence and self-centeredness will lead to health and fulfillment (see 3:5,8,9). If you want to grow toward spiritual maturity, you need to cultivate a mental focus on what God has provided for you through Jesus. This is what Paul teaches in Rom.12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:2 NKJV)

Paul uses two different verbs to describe the process of taking the path to the gospel.

II. Keep Seeking the Things Above

The first verb is "*zeteo*," which means "keep seeking; to inquire into; to find out by thinking, meditating, reasoning." Jesus uses *zeteo* when He asks His disciples: "Are you *deliberating* together about what I said?" (Jn.16:19). This command is in the present tense, emphasizing that we are to continue to do this. So Paul is saying: "Keep increasing in your understanding of God's provision through Jesus." Keep inquiring into this, keep thinking about this, keep reasoning about this, keep meditating on this.

Believers need an insatiable spiritual curiosity to know God. People have insatiable desires to learn about all kinds of subjects and events and people. But the most profitable desire of all is the desire to know Jesus! And yet, the more you learn and know about God, the more you realize how much more there is to learn and know about God.

What God has given us through Jesus is so immense that we can never fully comprehend it. The truth of the gospel is so profound and precious that we may never fully appreciate or understand it. But the path to the gospel includes an increasing comprehension and appreciation of God's gift to humanity and is right at the core of a spiritually healthy life.

It deepens our confidence and faith in God and His love. Walking the path of good news increases our gratitude to God and energizes our motivation to follow and serve God. When you lose your desire and curiosity to know more about Jesus, you will settle for the understanding you already have. Your appreciation of this great treasure begins to cool, and you start to take for granted the Christian life.

Complacency is the most common cause of spiritual sickness in the Christian life. Complacency is what opens the door of your heart to envying other people. When you lose your desire and focus on Christ, the devil begins to move in with temptation that leads to lusting for more money, possessions, prestige, popularity, or a host of other things.

Ungodliness is out of control in our world. Corruption and abuse abound at the highest levels. People use and abuse other people and dispose of them when they no longer need them or are disappointed with them. So, how do we "keep seeking the things above" in an evil and hostile environment? The scriptures suggest several very helpful things.

First, pray for God to open the eyes of your heart to see what He has given you (Eph.1:18,19a). Paul prays for the Ephesian believers. That "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. (Eph 1:18-19 NKJV)

These things are not merely cognitive concepts; they are spiritual truths that require spiritual illumination. How often do you ask God to open your eyes to the things happening in your world? Start listening to quality teachings and read quality books on this subject. Ask your Christian friends or spiritual mentor for suggestions.

When you find something in the scriptures that really speaks to you, digest what it has to say by re-listening and re-reading. In other words, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2Ti 2:15 NKJV)

When was the last time you got involved in a serious bible study? What was the last biblical teaching or Christian book that you did this with? Do you regularly discuss your faith and spiritual goals with Christian friends who have the same aspiration? "What passages in God's Word have been arresting you lately?" is a great question to keep discussion and dialogue going.

Biblical conversations will stimulate you in the best sense of the word. They will lead you to great teachings and books. They will lead to great prayer together. Who do you have in your life that you can do this with?

And most importantly, memorize and regularly meditate on key biblical passages. Learn and know your Bible. Meditation is mentally "chewing" the very words of God so that your soul digests its nourishment. Spurgeon said: "Meditation is of great value in opening up truth and leading us into (the Bible's) secrets... He who would be rich in these treasures must dig into scripture as one who seeks for choice pearls. You must go down into its depths, and you must rummage there until you get at last to the treasure... Cultivate much, then, the habit of... meditation, because of the way in which it opens up the truth."

Take a small passage like the one we're looking at today, Colossians 3:1-4. Keep writing it down, or listening to it, or repeating it until you know it by heart. Then say it back to God throughout the day or for several days. Turn it into a prayer. Turn its promises into prayers of thanksgiving, "God, I thank You that I have been raised up with Christ."

I am seeking those things which are above. I seek to know those things that Christ is making known to me since He is seated at your right hand. I am setting my mind on heavenly things, not on earthly things. Thank You, God, that I have died to self and my life is hidden with Christ in You. Thank You that when Christ appears, I will appear with Him in glory."

Make the scriptures come alive! Make its truth your truth. Make its prayers your prayers. Turn its commands into prayer requests: "God, help me to keep seeking the heavenly things in your word. Give me a renewed desire to do this. Help me to set my mind on learning and knowing these things." Let the Holy Spirit teach me your ways.

I wish I knew how to convince all of you to memorize and meditate on biblical passages about God's provisions! It is such a vanishing art among American Christians, and we are forfeiting immeasurable spiritual blessings because of this.

Read Psalm 1. Don't you want your life to be like this? Build into your life the habit of biblical meditation! Keep seeking the things which are above. They are foundational to growth and spiritual maturity.

III. Set Your Mind on the Things Above.

Just as foundational is Paul's command in verse 2, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." ([Col 3:2 NKJV](#))

"Set your mind" (*phroneo*) means "to focus your mind on something; to choose to adopt or maintain a point of view." It implies a mental battle with opposing views that are contradictory and must be rejected or replaced. Paul says not to focus on

the things that are on earth. This command is also in the present tense, so it is also something that we are to continue to do.

While we are to "keep seeking the things above," we also need to keep increasing our understanding of God's gift of Jesus and "set our minds on the things above." Paul emphasizes the need to keep identifying false thoughts and replacing them with God's truth. Paul describes this as "mental combat" in 2Cor.10:4 when he says, "For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," (2Co 10:4-5 NKJV)

The language here is very aggressive! We cannot allow false thoughts and feelings to take us hostage; we are to vigilantly monitor our thought-life and attack the lies contrary to the scriptures taking them prisoner to God's promises. Ponder what you know of God through the gospel and then apply it. One writer says, "Take yourself in hand, talk to yourself, make yourself look up from your problems to the God of the gospel."

D. M. Lloyd-Jones writes, "Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? You have to take yourself in hand; you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, and question yourself. You must say to yourself, 'Hope in God.' Remind yourself of who God is, and what God has done and what God has pledged He will do."

So how do we "set our minds on the things above?" You can start by asking God to reveal, to you, those thoughts and beliefs within you that are really ingrained lies of the devil. Psalm 139 say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting." (Psa 139:23-24 NKJV)

Meditating upon God's words will cause specific passages and promises to "come alive" to challenge those negative or despairing thoughts and arguments that Satan tries to use against us. Instead of thinking, "I'm just a loser," think Romans 8:37, "I am more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (Rom 8:37 NKJV)

Instead of thinking "I'll never recover from the bad situation I'm in," think Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose." (Rom 8:28 NKJV)

Instead of thinking, "This situation is going to ruin me," think 2 Corinthians 2:14, "Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ." (2Co 2:14 NKJV)

Do you get what I'm saying here? Think faith, not failure! If you have the courage, ask your friends or your spouse if they have any insight into the lies you tend to believe. When you ask your Christian friends, they will often have insight into lies you tend to believe, especially when adversity or disappointment hits. When you

become aware of a thought that is really an "intruder" lie, share that thought with God and then attack it by agreeing with what He says about it through His Word. Instead of entertaining destructive thoughts, think 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*." (1Co 10:13 NKJV)

If your afraid or full of anxiety, think 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2Ti 1:7 NKJV)

And if you have thoughts, "I just can't do it!" think, Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Php 4:13 NKJV)

Instead of thinking negatively, choose to believe what God says and move from believing lies to walking in truth. When you realize that one of Satan's lies has a stronghold on you, Remember 2 Corinthians 10:4, "For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," (2Co 10:4-5 NKJV)

When Satan is hurling those fiery darts of disbelief and doubt at you, tell your trusted Christian friends about it and ask them to pray daily with you for your deliverance and victory. Then go on the offensive by digging into God's Word and finding his answer to the tempting and alluring lies of the devil.

God's truth will always cause you to triumph over Satan's lies.

Conclusion

Walk the path that always leads you to the good news! Let the life of Jesus fill you with hope and confidence. Trust in God and triumph over this sinful world. Your life can be better than you ever dreamed it could be by listening and meditating upon the truth of God's word and following the path of the gospel.

Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Rom 1:16-17 NKJV)

Next week will dig into this Chapter deeper and tool out some practical benefits of taking the path of the good news.