

How To Live The Abundant Life

Colossians 3:1-4

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The title of my message is How to Live the Abundant Life. Follow with me as I read Colossians 3:1-4.

Paul says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

In John 10:10, Jesus made the familiar statement, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Now if you're a Christian, you have life the moment you trusted Jesus Christ; the life of God entered into your soul, and you were born again or born from above or born of the Spirit.

But the question I want to propose to you is: Would you say you have abundant life? Sometimes you feel that as a Christian, you're not experiencing all that God wants for you. Maybe after walking with the Lord for years, your Christianity has grown kind of stale or stagnant, isn't vibrant or alive. Instead of abundant life you have abundant bummer. Sometimes I see Christians and think to myself, They're going to heaven, but they look like hell right now. They look like they've been baptized in lemon juice. Where's the joy of the Lord? Where's the abundant life that Jesus promised?

The believers in Colosse were in danger of turning away from Christ and being spoiled, chapter 2, verse 8. False teachers had brought to them this idea that Jesus isn't enough, that Jesus isn't sufficient, that you need more than Jesus; a little legalism, maybe a little mysticism, maybe a little asceticism, maybe a little Greek philosophy. False teaching has been described as a combination of Greek philosophy, Jewish mysticism and eastern religions, combined together to create a "more-than-Jesus" philosophy. You have to co-exist and bring it all together; combine all these religions and then you have "more-than-Jesus" and that is what you need.

But I believe the theme of Colossians is that Christ is sufficient. In chapter 1, Paul declared Christ's sufficiency; in chapter 2, he defended Christ's sufficiency; and as we move to a new section, in chapters 3 and 4, Paul is actually telling us that we must demonstrate Christ's sufficiency in our daily lives. So the three sections of Colossians are Christ's sufficiency is declared, Christ's sufficiency is defended and Christ's sufficiency is demonstrated. We move from our creed, what we believe, to our conduct, how we live the Christian life.

In Christ, Colossians 2:9, it says "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." All fullness dwells in Christ. In chapter 2, verse 10, it says that in Him we "are complete." We have everything we need in Jesus Christ.

Paul is telling us know, beginning in chapter 3, verse 1, how to live out that fullness of Christ in our daily lives. So now we begin the practical section, so to speak, of the book of Colossians, or how to live the abundant life.

There are three things, from these four verses, that we must do if we are going to live the abundant life. The first thing we need to do is to seek heavenly things. Chapter 3, verse 1, says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

The basis of victorious Christian living is our identification with Christ. Notice Paul said, "If ye then be risen with Christ..." He is continuing this truth that we as believers are united to Christ; that we died with Christ in chapter 2, verse 20, and now we are risen with Christ and are to walk in newness of life. We are risen—past tense—with Christ.

In chapter 3, verse 1, Paul starts with the word "if"—"If ye then be risen with Christ..." He wasn't questioning whether or not they had been risen with Christ. He's actually making a statement; it's "Since ye then be risen with Christ..." Some translations have, "If you have, and you are, risen with Christ..."

What should we do as a result of having risen with Christ? We should "seek those things which are above," verse 1. In the context, it means that we're not seeking empty philosophy, chapter 2, verse 8; we're not seeking religious legalism, chapter 2, verse 16; and we're not seeking man-made disciplines, chapter 2, verses 20-23.

It's crazy the silly things that Christians do to try to grow spiritually. "I won't eat these foods," or "I won't wear these certain clothes," or "I'll read ten chapters a day," or "I'll go to church eight days a week," or "I'll do something special"; they're constantly trying to do something to bring some new vitality or life into their Christianity. They're looking for answers or some quick-fix. Maybe it's a new book. Maybe it's a new church. "My Christianity is growing stale, so I think I need a new church, or maybe I need a new preacher or maybe I need a new experience."

I can tell you right now what you need: You need Jesus Christ. Isn't Jesus Christ all that we need? Isn't Jesus Christ sufficient for every need? If the fullness of God dwells in Christ, then I have everything I need in Jesus Christ. That's why Paul says that in Him you are complete. You are fully-rigged, shipshape and ready to sail; you have everything you need in Christ. So why go looking anywhere else? Why go looking in another religious system? Why go looking into a man-made discipline? Why go looking into a philosophy? Why don't you realize that Christ is all that you need, and then pray that Christ is all that you want? That's what this passage is saying: Since you have "risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

What does Paul mean by "seek those things which are above"? Literally, in the Greek, it is "Keep on seeking." And by the way, this is what's called an imperative; it's a command, and it's in the present tense. What that means is that it's not an option; we, as Christians, are to be seeking heavenly things, and we are to be continually, habitually, ongoingly seeking those

things which are above.

But the answer to “What does it mean to ‘seek those things which are above’?” is given to us in verse 1 where it says that “Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” To “seek those things that are above” means that I’m seeking Christ, that I’m pursuing Christ, following hard after Jesus Christ. Spiritual maturity is a goal that demands diligent pursuit. In Philippians 3:10, it says these words: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.”

I believe that Paul beautifully summarizes that in the Philippians passage: “I want to know Him.” He wrote that thirty years after his conversion. Could you imagine meeting Paul thirty years after his conversion and he says, “I just want to know Jesus”?

“You already knew Jesus. Didn’t you meet Him thirty years ago?”

“Yeah, but I want to know Him more. I want to know Him deeper. I want to know Him more fully.”

The Christian life starts with conversion and starts a life-long pursuit of knowing Christ, of seeking Christ, of loving Christ. Do you know Him better than the day you were saved? Do you love Him more than the day you were saved? Are you experiencing Him more in your life than the day you were converted? If not, you’re not growing in your walk with Jesus. Growing in your walk with the Lord is just that: It’s a walk with the Lord. It’s not conduct and codes and creeds and things like that; it’s knowing and seeking Jesus.

How do we “seek those things which are above”? Paul said, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” Philippians 3:13-14. So Paul says he wants to know Jesus, he wants to be in fellowship with Him, he wants to be conformable to Him.

And how does he do it? Step number one, forget what is behind. Now forgetting what is behind doesn’t mean we have some kind of mental shock therapy and our memory is erased. It means that I don’t let the past influence me. A lot of Christians aren’t growing in the Lord, because the past is weighting them down. When you run the Christian race, you need to strip down—figuratively speaking—you need to look at Jesus and “run the race that is set before you,” to quote the writer of Hebrews.

In the world of the Olympics, when they run the track—I’ve never been in track and field; I don’t run. When I hear the word “exercise,” I sit down until the thought goes away. Do you ever see those guys run track and field? They wear little, silky, mini shorts. That’s why I don’t do track. And those little, sissy shoes they wear. They don’t wear football helmets and shoulder pads. They don’t carry their boom boxes going down the track. They just drop everything.

That’s why the writer of Hebrews says, “Lay aside every weight, and the sin, which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” We get so weighted

down. That's why in verse 2 he says, "...not on things on the earth." So we want to think about the "things above" as opposed to "things on the earth," because we are seeking and pursuing Jesus.

How do we do that? By prayer. If you're not praying, you're not seeking the Lord or setting "your affections..."—or mind—"...on things above." By studying God's Word, the Scriptures.

So in verse 1, we see "Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." It indicates that His work is finished, that He is the interceder for us—He is our intercessor—and that He is our sovereign or that He has the place of exalted and high position. So we are to seek the things that are above.

The second thing we are to do, verse 2, is that we are to think and seek heavenly things. It's easy to say, "Isn't this just repetition? Isn't this just saying the same thing in a different way?" It is but it isn't. I believe that seeking involves the will and a determination, and thinking involves the mind. Did you know that your mind matters when it comes to the spiritual life? That we need to make a determined effort to seek Christ, and we need to think about "things above"? So we move from the will to the mind; thinking involves the mind. "Set your affection..."—the word "affection" literally means "your mind"—"...on things above." This is a command and it's in the present tense; keep on thinking about things which are above.

Now what are these "things above" we are to think about? In contrast to the false teachings of the heretics, which were in the church at Colosse, we are to think about things that are heavenly things. I believe that as Christians, we need to be more heavenly minded. I know you've heard the old saying that "You're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good." I believe that if you're truly heavenly minded, you will be earthly good. I believe those who do the most for earth are those who think the most about heaven. Those who do the most for God now in this world are the ones who think the most about the next world. Heaven isn't just a final destination; heaven is a present motivation.

It's not just, "Oh, when I die I get to go to heaven, but until I die, I'm just hanging out here on earth." No. It's motivating to me to live for heaven and to think about heaven. That motivates me to tell other people about Jesus Christ and want them to go to heaven as well. We need to be more heavenly minded. I believe that there are many Christians who are so earthly minded that they're no heavenly good. All we think about is what is on earth.

Jesus said it like this: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If you're really into your car—Cars are okay, but it's all going to burn. I just thought I'd encourage you. "Well, I just got a new car." You park it in two spots, turn it sideways so no one will ding it. When you get out of your car, you back up from it and kind of look at it like, "Yeah!" You think about it at night and during the day, and you polish it. That's cool, but it's an earthly thing. It's going to just rust and be gone. There are so many things that we set our minds on in this earth that are temporal. I love that Scripture that says, "Everything that is seen is temporal." Only that which is not seen is eternal.

So are you living for the temporal, or are you living for the eternal? We are to be thinking of eternal things. We are to be motivated by heaven. We are to be thinking about heaven. We are to put our minds on “things above” and not on things of this earth.

In Philippians 4:8, Paul tells us what to think about: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest...just...pure...lovely...of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” That’s going to be hard to do if you spend the majority of your time watching TV or on things that are not edifying or building you up. There are things in our lives that are either a wing or a weight. You have to look at things in your life and say, “Well, it’s not sinful. It’s not intrinsically wrong, but it’s not helping me grow in my walk with Christ. It’s hindering me.” It might be a relationship with somebody. It might be a profession you have. It might be a hobby or some other passion. Whatever it is, it’s a wing or a weight. You need to discard the weight and the sin, and you need to “run with patience the race that is set before us.” Pursue Jesus and think about Jesus. The mind matters.

The third step we are to do, verses 3-4, is to believe heavenly things. So we have seek heavenly things, think heavenly things and then we are to believe heavenly things. Paul says, “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” Paul again brings us back to heaven. He starts by saying that you’ve risen with Christ, set you mind on things above and one day Christ is going to come from heaven and you’re going to be appearing with Him in glory. So this is the reason or motivation for seeking and thinking heavenly things. We have to have a rationale or a motive or a foundation behind it.

There are five things I want you to see from this text. We need to believe that we have died with Christ, verse 3. It says, “For ye are dead.” That’s in the past tense. When you were born again, you died with Jesus. To all the affections and lust of the former life—everything that enamored you and enticed you and fascinated you of the things of the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life—you are dead. How much temptation is there to a dead person? Very little; right?

I love baked goods, anything baked: pies, cakes, cookies. Praise God for that. But when I die, you could put donuts right under my nose, and I won’t smell them, I won’t be tempted and I won’t partake of them.

Paul tells us that when we were saved, in our identification with Christ, we died to the Law. It was nailed to the Cross. We were buried and we died also to the world and all of its affections and all its lusts. We used to sing

Content to let the world go by,

To know no gain nor loss.

My sinful self, my only shame.

My glory, all the Cross.

Are you content to let the world go by? To know no gain nor loss? Your sinful self, your only shame? Your glory's all the Cross? That's what it means to die unto this world. So you need to believe that, verse 3. In our identification with Christ, we have set the Cross between ourselves and all the subtle, little allurements of sin.

The second thing we need to believe, verse 3, is that our lives are hidden with Christ in God. There are a lot of things implied with this concept of what it means to be "hid with Christ in God." It first means secrecy. The world cannot see who we really are. The world doesn't know that we are the children of God. There will come that day when there will be the "manifestation of the sons of God" when they will see us for who we really are.

They don't really know that this world is not our home. They don't understand that our home is in heaven. They don't understand that God is our Father, that we don't care about the things of this world, and they're hidden from our view. That's one thing it means.

But it also means safety. This is what really blesses my heart: to realize that I'm secure in Christ. I believe in the security of the true child of God. If you're not really a Christian, there's no security there, because you're not born again. But if you're born again, you're taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. I believe that once you're placed in Christ, you're always in Christ. Romans 8:1 says that "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." How does the chapter end? No separation to those who are, again, "in Christ Jesus."

So the Holy Spirit took you out of Adam and placed you in Christ, and in Christ, you are secure. You are actually hidden in Christ, Who is hidden in God. Jesus said it like this in John 14:20: "At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." Every time I read that it sounds like an old Beatles song. But Jesus said that there's coming a day when you'll know that "I'm in you, and you are in Me and I am in My Father." We're all wrapped up in Jesus Christ, we're hidden in Christ and we're secure in Christ.

The third thing you need to believe is in verse 4: Christ is your life. I love that statement. Paul says that "When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear...." It's not His teachings. It's not His example. It's He Himself. We live because of Jesus Christ. He's the bread of God that comes down from heaven. If we eat of it, we'll never again be hungry. But we need to keep eating of Christ by faith. He's the water of life. "If you drink of Me, you will never thirst." "He is the vine, and we are the branches." We must stay abiding in Him, then we will bring forth much fruit. Christ is our life. Just as a bird flies in the heavens and a fish swims in the sea, so we are in Christ. He's our very substance.

Fourthly, we need to believe that Christ will appear. We need to keep that before our very eyes and remember that. Verse 4, "When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear...." There are different Greek words used for the coming of the Lord. Sometimes the word "parousia" is used, which

means “His presence.” When Christ comes, He’ll come personally, and He’ll be present with us. Sometimes it uses the word for “unveiled” or “apocalypse.” It means the unveiling. We get our word for the book of Revelation, the “apokalupsis.” As Christ is unveiled. It’s the unveiling of Jesus Christ. The Second Coming of Christ is His unveiling.

Then there’s the word “appear”—“epiphaneia”—which means He’s coming in splendor, in majesty and in glory. All these words mean He’ll be personally coming, He’ll be unveiled and He’ll come in power, in majesty and He’ll come in glory. I believe that Paul is alluding to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in this passage. One of the great motivations for living the holy life is that Jesus Christ is coming back. He will return.

Notice fifthly, and lastly, we believe that we will appear with Him in glory, verse 4. “When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear...”—He’s coming—“...then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” Jesus said it like this in one of the greatest promises He made in the Bible in John 14:27: He said, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Have you ever had a troubled heart? Have you ever had a fearful heart? You look around the world, you look at your health, you look at life and its situations, and you’re filled with fear. What’s the future hold? Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” He said, “...ye believe in God, believe also in Me,” John 14:1. Then He made this promise: “In my Father’s house...”—which is heaven, the things above—“...are many mansions....” The Greek could be “abiding places.” Some translations have “apartments.” No thank you. I’ve waited all my life for the Lord to come to take me to my “apartment” in heaven? I’ll stick with the King James translation there: “mansions.” I like that. He’s building a mansion for me up there.

Rubies and diamonds, silver and gold

His coffers are full; He has riches untold.

I’m a child of the King,

I’m a child of the King

With Jesus as my Savior,

I’m a child of the King.

I’m going to heaven! Have you ever had the reality—has it ever hit you that you’re actually going to spend eternity in heaven with God? What a glorious thought! And that is a motivation right now. I don’t have to be fearful. I don’t have to be troubled. My life is “hid with Christ in God.” Christ, Who is my life, will appear, and I will “appear with Him in glory.” Paul is telling us that it’s all about heaven. It’s all about seeking the things which are above, heavenly things. It’s all about thinking the things which are above, heavenly things. It’s all about believing the things that are in the Scriptures; that Christ will come again and He will receive me unto Himself, that where He is, I will also be, John 14:3.

So we seek the heavenly, we think the heavenly and, because heaven is our eternal home, we believe in the heavenly. Jesus will appear, and you will share in His glory. In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul says again, “For our conversation...”—or “citizenship”—“...is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall change our vile body...”—or our “lowly bodies” or our “bodies of humiliation”—“...that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body.”

How many want to get a new body? I do. Everybody over 60, raise their hand. Hallelujah! Some of you young people say, “I like my body!” You check yourself out in the mirror when you walk by. Flex your muscles. Just wait buckaroo! Actually, from 25 on, it’s downhill. I’ve been going downhill for a long time.

The Bible says that in this body, we earnestly “groan” for our heavenly bodies. We want to be clothed with that new body. No more pain. No more sickness. No more sorrow. No more suffering. And He “shall wipe away all tears” from our eyes, Revelation 7:17. We’re going to heaven.

So we died with Christ, we’re risen with Christ, we’re living in Christ—He’s our very life—Christ is coming again. And with Christ we’ll spend eternity in heaven. It’s all about Jesus Christ. In Him we are complete. In Him we experience the abundant life.

Don’t settle for substitutes. Don’t let anyone spoil you. Don’t let anyone defraud you. Don’t let anyone get you off track. Keep your heart and your mind focused on pursuing Jesus Christ.

As we partake of Communion, it’s all about Jesus. The bread is a symbol of His body, broken for us. The cup is a symbol of His blood, shed for us. Jesus said, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup” you show or demonstrate—it’s a type of picture—His death. Jesus said He wouldn’t drink of the fruit of the vine until He drank it with us in His Father’s kingdom.

So if you are a Christian, you’re welcome to the Lord’s table to partake. If you’re not a Christian, you need to trust Christ. Taking Communion won’t save you. The thing you need to do is trust Jesus. You need the substance. You need the reality. You need to say, “God, I’m sorry for my sins. Jesus, I believe You died on the Cross for me. I ask You to please forgive me and come into my heart and to make me Your child.” You need to repent of your sins. That means that you need to turn from your sins and you need to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. You need to trust Him today. You need to invite Him to come into your heart and to take control; to forgive you and to take over as Lord and Savior of your life. If you haven’t done that, you need to do that right now.

Let’s bow our heads in a word of prayer.