

How To Live The Abundant Life

Colossians 3:1-4

Pastor John Miller

In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul says, “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...”—it like that, “Christ our life”—“...appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

In John 10:10, Jesus said, “I have come that [you] may have life, and that [you] may have it more abundantly.” When you are a believer, you are born of the Spirit, and the life of God enters your soul. Before salvation you “were dead in trespasses and sins,” but now that you have been born again, you have the life of God in your soul. That’s the definition of a Christian: you have life.

But not always, as believers, do we experience the abundance of life that God wants us to have. So not only did Jesus say that “I have come that [you] may have life,” but we should have life more abundantly.

As a Christian, ask yourself, “Do I experience the abundant life that Christ wants me to have? I am saved and going to heaven, but do I have heaven on earth?”

Someone said, “A little faith will take your soul to heaven, but a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul.” So even before you get to heaven, you can have heaven now, if you focus on Christ, that He is your sufficiency, and rely upon Him and walk in the Spirit. Then you can experience the abundant life that God has for you.

The believers in Colosse were in danger of being “spoiled,” so that is why Paul is instructing them on how to live the abundant life. In Colossians 2:8, it says that they were going to be spoiled or cheated by “philosophy...empty deceit...the tradition of men” and by “the basic principles of the world.” These things were “not according to Christ.” So in context, Paul was warning them not to be spoiled.

Chapter 3 of Colossians starts the practical part of the book. Paul’s letters always have principles followed by practical teaching, or doctrine and then duty or belief and then behavior. His letters are always laid out with what we believe, because it determines how we behave.

So Paul is warning them not to get involved with legalism, mysticism or asceticism—all these different mystic religions and “isms” that have come along. People want to add to Christianity. Paul said that they have Christ, and Christ is sufficient. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” so why would they turn to Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy or Eastern mysticism? Paul preaches Christ, and he wants us to focus on Christ, who is sufficient for all our needs.

Outlining the book of Colossians, in chapter 1, Paul declared Christ's sufficiency; in chapter 2, he defended Christ's sufficiency; and in chapters 3-4, Paul says that we must demonstrate Christ's sufficiency in our daily lives. He declares it, he defends it and we should demonstrate it.

Before we move to chapter 3, I want to look back at Colossians 1:19. Paul says, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell." And in Colossians 2:10, it says, "You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." The word "complete" means "shipshape, fully rigged and ready to sail." So Paul is saying that you shouldn't turn to the philosophies of man. He pointed out their deficiencies. We should trust in Christ's sufficiency; He is all that we need, because "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." We are complete in Him.

Paul now moves from creed to conduct, in chapter 3. From our text, there are three things that we must do if we are going to live the abundant, Christian life that God wants us to have. First, we need to seek heavenly things, verse 1. "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God."

The basis of victorious, Christian living is our position and identification in Christ. That is a very important, foundational truth to grasp. It is the basis for my victorious, Christian life—not just for my salvation—but also for my sanctification. This is one of the most important doctrines for a Christian to understand.

The Bible sees every human being as being in Adam when they're born. And under Adam, we have sin, death and condemnation. But when you are born again, you are placed in Jesus Christ, who is called "the last Adam." These are the two federal heads. All of humanity is either in Adam—and if you are, you are lost and unsaved and will perish in your sin if you don't repent and believe in Christ—or in Christ, if you believe in Jesus and are born again. And when you are born again, you are taken out of Adam the moment of your salvation and are placed in Christ.

This is why we see Paul use the phrase "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus" and "with Christ" over and over. It's because the believer's identification is Christ. Christ's righteousness and the strength to live the Christ-like life is imputed to us. Our position is sure in Christ; it doesn't change, because we're "complete" in Christ. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." So my position in Christ means that I am forgiven, that righteousness has been imputed to me and I have imparted righteousness to live a sanctified, abundant life.

Understand that you have been identified with Christ. When Jesus died on the Cross, you died with Him. When Jesus was buried, you were buried with Him. When Jesus rose from the dead, you rose with Him. When Jesus ascended, you ascended with Him. When Jesus was seated "at the right hand of God the Father," you were seated with Christ "in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power." So what a wonderful thing it is to be identified with and in Christ.

Notice verse 1. "If then you were raised with Christ..." Remember in chapter 2, verse 20, it says, "If you died with Christ," and now in chapter 3, verse 1, it says, "If then you were raised with Christ." So first we died with Jesus Christ on the Cross, and now we are risen with Christ.

By the way, water baptism is a symbol of your identification with Christ. When we think of baptism, we make a mistake if we only think in terms of being immersed in water or being immersed in God. The idea is also identification. When you were baptized, it was a picture of your identification "in Christ."

In the book of Corinthians, Paul talks about the people of Israel coming out of the Exodus, crossing the Red Sea and going into the Promised Land. He said they were "baptized into Moses." But they didn't get wet; they walked on dry land. It means they were identified with Moses. The symbolic meaning of the word "baptism" or "baptizó" means "to identify with."

So at baptism, not only are you immersed in Christ; you are also identified with Him. What is true of Christ is true of you. That's why by the time Paul gets to verses 3 and 4 of our text, he says that we need to believe these truths so we can behave in the way we should.

The word "if" in verse 1 is called "a first-class, conditional cause." It conveys the idea that "If then you were raised with Christ—and you have been raised with Christ...." Some translations say, "Since you are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." So Paul is not questioning whether or not these believers in Colosse have risen with Christ.

And this statement is true for all believers. All believers are "in Christ," all believers have been risen with Christ and identified with Him.

Now since we are risen with Christ, what should we do? "Seek those things which are above." In contrast to that, we are not to seek empty philosophy, chapter 2, verse 8; or religious legalism, chapter 2, verses 16-17. In chapter 2, verse 8, it says, "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." Then in verses 16-17, Paul says, "Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."

So they were in danger of being cheated or spoiled or coming under legalism regarding diet and weekly, monthly and annual holy days. They were in danger of forgetting Christ and lapsing into legalism regarding rites in order to be more "spiritual."

Don't do that. It's very sad what Christians get involved in, thinking it will make them more spiritual. "If I don't eat that, I'll be a 'super saint.'" You might be healthier, but it's not going to make you more spiritual. Eating a hamburger is not going to make you more spiritual. It might make you healthier, but not more spiritual. Chuck Smith used to say, "I'm going to eat my pie and just go early."

Some people say, "Don't touch that! Don't eat that! You've gotta worship on this day. You've

gotta be baptized. You've gotta read this book. You've gotta listen to this preacher!" People will go from church to church looking for a deeper life. A deeper spiritual life is found in the Bible, in Christ. Don't spoil your Christianity by looking at other things that are unnecessary when you have the fullness of God in Christ.

So what are we supposed to do? We are to "seek those things which are above." And what does it mean to "seek those things which are above"? The word "seek" in the Greek literally means "a constant, continual seeking." It is an imperative, so it is a command in the present tense. It's not an option; it's a command. That means that we are to continually, habitually "seek those things which are above." It is an active pursuit of God. It is seeking Christ, who is "sitting at the right hand of God" the Father, verse 1.

Seeking "things which are above" is summarized in seeking Christ, who sits "at the right hand of God" the Father. If you are seeking Jesus Christ, you are actually seeking "those things which are above." In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." So as Christians, our whole disposition should be oriented toward heavenly things and toward Christ, who is in heaven.

Someone used the analogy of a needle in a compass, how it always orients itself toward north. Today we have GPSs on our phones, so we don't get in a car and use a compass and a map to try to figure out which way we should go. A compass is cool; no matter which direction you turn it, the needle always faces north.

The same thing should be true of a Christian. Your life should constantly be pointed toward Jesus. No matter which way the wind blows, what the circumstances are you're going through or what is happening around you, you should always be looking to Jesus Christ. Like a compass that always points north, we should always be looking up at Christ, who is in heaven.

Spiritual maturity is the goal, and it demands diligent pursuit. Paul said, in Philippians 3:10, "... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Paul had written the words "that I may know Him," that he wanted to know "the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings" and "conformed to His death" 30 years after his conversion. Paul had been a Christian for 30 years, yet he still said that he wanted to "know Him." Our response would be, "Paul, you met Him 30 years ago on the road to Damascus!" But Paul is saying, "Yes, but I want to know Him more. I don't just want to have life; I want to have abundant life. And the more I know Him, the more I seek Him, the more I think about Him, the more I pursue Him, the more I will have Christ in me and His life lived through me."

Then Paul goes on in Philippians to say, in verses 13-14, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press..."—in our text he uses the word "seek"—"... toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." So Paul had a "sanctified dissatisfaction"; he said, "I do not count myself to have apprehended."

When you think that you have arrived, you have not arrived. You may stand up at a testimony service and say, “I’m under the sprout where the glory comes out.’ I’m on Canaan’s land. I’m on the mountain with God. I’ve arrived. There’s no more need to seek the Lord. I’ve finally reached the pinnacle,” but the Bible says, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” It’s a dangerous thing.

So Paul says, “I haven’t yet attained; I want to know Him more, and I want to pursue Him.” He has to forget what is behind. What he means by that is, “Don’t let the past hinder you in the present or from running the race in the future.” It doesn’t mean that you get your mind cleansed from past memories; it means don’t let them hold you back.

Then Paul says, in Philippians 3:14, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This word “press” means “to agonize” or “agonizomai” in the Greek.

Athletes train, work hard and discipline their bodies to do what they want them to do. When I hear the word “exercise,” I sit down until the thought goes away. I’m kidding. But as Christians, we can’t do that. “I’ll just sit on the sidelines. I’ll just watch everyone else run the race.” No; we have to agonize, lean in and press.

That’s what Paul is describing in verse 1 of our text: He says, “[I] seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting on the right hand of God.” You could do a whole study on Christ “sitting on the right hand of God.” It’s a marvelous truth in the Scriptures. It means that He has rested from and finished His work, is seated and is the Intercessor. When you pray to God the Father, you get to Him through God the Son, by the Holy Spirit. It also means that He is sovereign. “The right hand of God” is a place of preeminence and authority.

How then do we “seek those things which are above”? By prayer and the study of God’s Word. It also helps to go to church. But just being in church is not enough. You need to read your Bible, pray and seek the Lord, and meditate on what you’ve heard at church and what you’ve read in the Word of God. And ask God to implement it in your life.

The second thing we must do to obtain the abundant, Christian life is to think heavenly things, verse 2. “Set your mind on things above, not...”—so don’t do this—“...on things on the earth.”

To “seek” involves the will and to think involves the mind. So you’re seeking, which involves the will, and you’re thinking, which involves the mind. Your mind matters in your Christian life. Did you ever think about what you should think about? I think we should think about that; it’s so important. Even as a Christian, your mind should not be allowed to go to places where it shouldn’t go. The Bible says, “...bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” If you allow your mind to go wherever it wants to go, it’s going to go to places it shouldn’t go and think about things it shouldn’t think about.

Someone said, “If we sow a thought, we reap an act. If we sow an act, we reap a habit. If we sow a habit, we reap a character. If we sow a character, we reap a destiny.” It all starts with our thoughts. The Bible says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” So we need to discipline our

minds, thinking of things that “are above.”

“Set your mind...”—or “affection”—“...on things above,” verse 2. The word “affection” is regarding your mind. The word “affection” is translated in multiple places in the New Testament as “mind.” One place is Philippians 2:5. It says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” So we have the mind of Christ as we seek Christ.

Verse 2 of our text is an imperative; it's a command. And it's in the present tense, so it's saying, “Keep on thinking of things which are above.”

What are we to think about? Paul calls it “things above,” which is in contrast to “things on the earth.” So we are not to think about the false teachings of the religious leaders, not legalism or mysticism or asceticism, not Greek philosophy or man's ideas of tradition. But we are to think of things which are from heaven. We need to be more heavenly minded, if we are to experience heaven on earth.

Sometimes people say that you can become so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good. And there is a pseudo-heavenly mindedness. You put on a white robe and sit high up on a mountain waiting for the rapture. You don't get engaged in life. That's not Christianity. Christianity is not hiding away in a monastery somewhere, being “holier than thou.” We are to live our lives as Christ would have us live our lives.

But if we are truly heavenly minded, we will be truly of earthly good. I also believe that the more heavenly minded we are, the more earthly good we become.

The problem today is not that the church is too heavenly minded that it's no earthly good; the problem today is that it is too earthly minded that it is no heavenly good. We don't sing about heaven enough, we don't preach about heaven enough, we don't talk about heaven enough, we don't look to heaven enough. It's because we're so earthbound. We're to be salt and light and engaged in our culture.

Verses 3-4 talks about Christ coming from heaven, and we're going to heaven, because that's our eternal home. This world is not our home. We're to be dead to the things of this world but live for eternity. The Bible says, “Things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” We need to live for that which is eternal.

So we are to think “on things above,” verse 2. We are to think on heavenly things. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Paul said in Philippians 4:8, “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” All of these things describe Jesus Christ. When you think about Jesus, you are thinking about things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of a good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. So those are the things we should think about. The mind should be focused “on things above.”

In Romans 12:1, Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice....And do not be conformed to this world." One translation says, "Don't let the world press you into its mold." Then Paul goes on to say, "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind." There it is again. And our minds are renewed by the Word of God and by prayer. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and transforms our minds as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So the first thing we are to do is to seek heavenly things, the second thing is to think heavenly things or mind your mind and the third thing we are to do to live an abundant, Christian life is believe in heavenly things, verses 3-4. Now, in verses 3-4, Paul gives us the rationale or reasons why we should "seek those things which are above...set your mind on things above." Why? "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When..."—I like that because it's "when," not "if"—"...Christ who is our life appears, then..."—that is, "when Christ appears"—"...you also will appear with Him in glory." How marvelous that is. What begins with grace will end in glory.

There are five reasons, in verses 3-4, why we are to be motivated to seek and set our minds on heavenly things. First, you are dead in Christ. This is past tense; it's already happened. You died when Jesus died. You were taken out of Adam and placed in Christ, so you were identified with Him in His death. When Jesus died on the Cross, He said, "It is finished!" or "Paid in full," and your sins were forgiven. You are free from the penalty of the Law of sin and death.

So in our identification with Christ, we have set the Cross between ourselves and all the subtle allurements of sin and the world. I like the words of the hymn that says,

"Content to let the world go by,

To know no gain nor loss,

My sinful self, my only shame,

My glory, all the Cross."

Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Have you died to the world? Are you still in love with the world? Are you attracted to the world? Are you living for the world? Or have you set your affections, your heart, on things above? It's not that you check out of this world; it's that you are a pilgrim, and you see that your real home is in heaven. You have died with Christ. That is a truth for all Christians. Paul said in Galatians 6:14, "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

The second reason we are to "seek those things which are above" is because "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." This conveys two things: secrecy and safety. What do I mean by

secrecy? “Hidden” indicates that it is hidden from the world.

Did you know that your faith in Christ, your identification with Christ, your relationship to Christ, is hidden to a non-Christian, to the world. It's an enigma to them. When you think about loving Jesus, knowing Jesus, being born again, they don't understand anything you're talking about. They don't know why you go to church—especially on Wednesday nights. They don't know why you live for Christ, why you talk about heaven. They just think you're an enigma, because it's hidden from them. It's not something they see or understand.

But we'll see in verses 3-4, when Christ comes again, we will appear with Him in glory and there will be “the revealing of the sons of God.” The world will see Christ then, and “Every knee shall bow to [Jesus] and every tongue shall confess to God.” And they will see the church coming back with Jesus, Revelation 19. Then it won't be hidden from them anymore. But now these things are in secrecy, hidden from the world.

Safety and security is also conveyed in “Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” We are secure in Christ. In John 14:20, Jesus said, “At that day...”—a reference to Pentecost, in Acts 2—“...you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” When the Holy Spirit descended and the church was born, they were all filled with the Spirit and formed the body of Christ. They were all “in Christ,” and “in Christ,” we are all complete.

“In Me” is justification and “I in you” is sanctification. So two things happen: I'm in Christ—justified and declared righteous; and Christ is in me—sanctified, to make me righteous.

Thus the abundant, Christian life, which is the Spirit-filled Christian life, is a life that is growing in Christ, growing in sanctification, growing in the knowledge of Christ, growing in likeness to Christ. You have been declared righteous in Christ, positionally, but practically, He wants to make you righteous in the way that you live in your daily life.

So you have died with Christ and are buried with Christ, your life is hidden with Christ in God and the Bible also teaches that we are risen with Christ and ascended and seated with Christ in heaven.

Now thirdly, Christ is your life, verse 4. It says, “When Christ who is our life...”

Is Christ your life? Do you live in Christ? Do you breathe Christ? Do you worship Christ? We live with Christ, for Christ and in Christ; Christ is our life. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He is “the way”; without Him there is no going. He is “the truth”; without Him there is no knowing. He is “the life”; without Him there is no living. If you're not “in Christ,” you're not a believer, and you don't have the life of Christ in your soul.

So notice, fourthly, that Jesus will also appear. Verse 4 says, “When Christ who is our life appears....” It doesn't say He might appear or maybe He'll appear or we hope He'll appear. It's “When Christ...appears.”

The word “appear” is the word “epiphaneia.” It means “to manifest His splendor, His majesty or His glory.” The Bible also uses the word “come,” as in “He will come.” It’s the Greek word “parousia,” which means “His presence.” And it also uses the word “apokalypsis,” which means “unveiling.” He will be revealed. So Jesus will come.

And when will He come? He will first come for the church in the rapture. And then, in Revelation 19, Christ will return in the Second Coming in power and glory. We’ll come back with Him in the Second Coming, when “Every eye will see Him,” and they will see His power and majesty.

In Revelation 19, John describes His coming. “His eyes were like a flame of fire,” “He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood” and “He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: ‘King of kings and Lord of lords.’” Then in Revelation 1:14-16 John says, “His head and hair were white like wool...Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.”

Jesus came the first time incognito, born of a virgin in Bethlehem as a baby. But He is coming the second time as the “King of kings and Lord of lords,” and we will be coming with Him. That is the word “epiphaneia,” in the splendor of His appearing.

When Christ comes, the world will see and the hidden will be revealed.

Then fifthly, we will appear with Him. Verse 4 says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear...”—we will be made visible—“...with Him in glory.” This is glorification.

So we have salvation—I’m in Christ; we have sanctification—Christ is in me; and we have glorification—we will be “with Him in glory.” Jesus said in John 14:2-3 that “In My Father’s house are many mansions....I go to prepare a place for you.” And He said, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” Jesus went to heaven, which He calls His “Father’s house.”

I like the King James translation of “mansions.” I know the Greek word could be technically translated “abiding places”; some people have “apartment” written there. But that’s why I like the King James translation. I’m not waiting for an apartment; I’m waiting for a “mansion.” How marvelous.

We live for heaven, we wait for Christ to come from heaven, we seek Him in heaven and we look to Him in heaven. “Seek...set” and believe that you have died with Christ, you’ve risen with Christ, you’re seated with Christ, you will come with Christ, you will co-reign with Christ for 1,000 years and you will live with Christ in an eternal state forever. That’s “the revealing of the sons of God,” Romans 8:19. So seek the heavenly, think the heavenly, because your eternal home is in heaven.

In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul said, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.”

You are “in Christ.” Christ is sufficient, so don’t be spoiled. Don’t be spoiled by philosophy, man’s traditions, legalism, mysticism or asceticism. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” You are complete in Him.

So seek Him, set your affections on Him and believe what God says about you is true; that you are “in Christ,” you died, you’ve risen, you’ve ascended, you’re seated and you are living the victorious, Christian life by appropriating your position “in Christ.”