



Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study  
**Bible Study Session 11**  
Colossians 3:1-4 : Topic 6.1  
"Living the Resurrected Life"

Study By  
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### Greek NT

3.1 Εἰ οὖν συνηγήθητε τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος· 2 τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, 3 ἀπεθάνετε γάρ, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ· 4 ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.

### Gute Nachricht Bibel

3 1 Wenn ihr nun mit Christus auferweckt seid, dann orientiert euch nach oben, wo Christus ist! Gott hat ihm den Ehrenplatz an seiner rechten Seite gegeben. 2 Richtet also eure Gedanken nach oben und nicht auf die irdischen Dinge! 3 Ihr seid doch gestorben, und euer Leben ist mit Christus bei Gott verborgen. 4 Wenn einmal Christus, euer Leben, allen sichtbar wird, dann werdet auch ihr mit ihm zusammen in der ganzen Herrlichkeit sichtbar werden, die euch jetzt schon geschenkt ist.

### NRSV

1 So if 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, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

### NLT

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power. 2 Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth. 3 For you died when Christ died, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

## The Study of the Text:<sup>1</sup>

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

With Col. 3:1-4, we turn a corner with the emphases in the letter. This passage introduces us to the 'epistolary paraenesis' material that will dominate the text from 3:1 to 4:6. Paul shifts away from the false teaching to an emphasis on legitimate patterns of Christian living that should stem out of one's conversion commitment to Christ. Instead of rules and regulations being imposed from external sources that accomplish nothing except to re-enslave the individual to demonic forces (cf. 2:20-23), guidelines and patterns of appropriate behavior and living are embedded in one's initial faith commitment to Christ. Under the leadership of Christ through His indwelling Spirit, these patterns will shape and give direction to Christian living that is pleasing to God. Col. 3:1-4 stands as both an introductory and a foundational expression of that direction. But as we will see below under the Literary Setting, the writing pattern of 'chaining' pericopes together continues. Thus 3:1-4 is linked to 2:20-23 by a common topic sentence structure. In subsequent studies we will also observe how 3:1-4 is linked not just to 3:5-11 but to the remaining pericopes in the paraenetical section: 3:5-11, 3:12-17; 3:18-19; 3:20-21; 3:22-4:1; 4:2-6.

Additionally, this shift from the 'theoretical' to the 'practical' with 3:1-4 is standard Pauline writing style. The classic model of this in the Pauline letters of the New Testament is Rom. 12:1-2 that plays the same role in that letter as 3:1-4 does in this letter. In writing this way, the apostle makes a fundamental theological

<sup>1</sup>Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

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point: living in holiness requires being made holy by God. Conversion sets the believer apart to Christ in righteousness; Christian living then flows out of this new relationship with Christ in righteousness.

### Historical Context:

**External History.** In the history of the copying of this passage over the first eight or so centuries, hardly any variations of wording surface in the five thousand plus manuscripts that are known to exist today. The editors of the UBS *Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) considered on one place to merit inclusion in the text apparatus of this printed Greek New Testament. This concerns the pronoun ὑμῶν (*your*) in verse four.<sup>2</sup> Some manuscripts replace ὑμῶν with ἡμῶν (*our*).<sup>3</sup> As is obvious from the spelling, only one letter is different between the two pronouns and in the pronunciation systems over the centuries of copying hardly any noticeable difference in pronouncing these two words existed. The stronger evidence centers on the better and earlier manuscripts containing ὑμῶν, and this favors the adoption of the second person plural pronoun over the first person pronoun.



The editors of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev ed.) found only one additional place where variation in wording surfaces among the many manuscript copies of this passage.<sup>4</sup> Only Alexandrinus is the significant manuscript that drops the prepositional phrase σὺν αὐτῷ (*together with Him*); the others are late and not significant manuscripts. The impact on the larger expression τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς *σὺν αὐτῷ* φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ (*then you also will be revealed with him in glory*) is not substantial.



Thus with these two Greek sentences in vv. 1-4 we can be confident of the original wording that was first produced in the writing of the document. This provides a solid foundation then for interpreting the passage.

**Internal History.** The time / place markers in 3:1-4 are very theological in their orientation, and thus significant to the understanding of the text.

The **time markers** revolve around the believers' religious experience. **Past Time.** The "have been raised with Christ" verb (συνηγήθητε τῷ Χριστῷ) looks back to the conversion of the believers, via the past time Aorist Greek verb. Conversion is a spiritual resurrection experience. But conversion is also a death experience as "you died" (ἀπεθάνετε) in v. 3 asserts with the use of the Aorist tense Greek verb. The significance of this particular tense form of the ancient Greek verb, the Aorist tense, is to specify a moment in past time when the dying and raising actions occurred. In the context here, this past moment was the point of conversion to Christianity by Paul's readers. In the parallel usage here, this dying and rising is but two ways of viewing the one event in their lives spiritually. Outwardly and visible to other people at this moment was the verbal confession of Jesus as Lord (cf. Rom. 10:9-10) which was openly affirmed by their public water baptism. But inwardly from the spiritual perspective this moment signaled a dying to the old life outside Christ and a being raised in new spiritual life in close union with the resurrected Christ. It is this past experience that becomes foundational to daily living in the present.

**Present Time.** The three admonitions, "set your sights on" (v. 1, ζητεῖτε) and "Let heaven fill your thoughts.

<sup>2</sup> {B} ὑμῶν P<sup>46</sup> ⋈ C D\* F G P Ψ 075 33 81 104 256 (263 ἐν σαρκὶ ὑμῶν) 459 1319 1881 1912 2127 I 422 it<sup>ar</sup>. b. d. f. g. mon. o vg syr<sup>pal</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> arm eth Origen<sup>gr 1/2, lat 1/2</sup> Eusebius Gregory-Nyssa Chrysostom Severian Theodore<sup>lat</sup> Cyril<sup>5/7</sup>; Cyprian Ambrosiaster Hilary<sup>1/2</sup> Chromatius Gaudentius<sup>1/2</sup> Pelagius Augustine<sup>30/34</sup> // ἡμῶν B D<sup>1</sup> H 0150 6 365 424 436 1175 1241 1573 1739 1852 1962 2200 2464 Byz [K L] Lect syr<sup>p, h</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> geo slav Origen<sup>gr 1/2, lat 1/2</sup> Methodius Gregory-Nyssa<sup>mss</sup> Cyril<sup>2/7</sup>; Hilary<sup>1/2</sup> Ambrose Gaudentius<sup>1/2</sup> Jerome Augustine<sup>4/34</sup> Paulinus-Nola

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

<sup>3</sup> "Although it is possible that ἡμῶν, which is supported by B D<sup>c</sup> H K 326 614 1241 syr<sup>p, h</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> al, was altered by copyists to ὑμῶν in order to agree with the second person pronouns before and after, the Committee was impressed by the considerably stronger manuscript evidence that supports ὑμῶν, including P<sup>46</sup> and good representatives of both the Alexandrian and the Western text-types (⋈ C D\* F G P Ψ 33 81 88 104 1739 it vg cop<sup>bo</sup> goth arm eth al)." [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 557.]

#### <sup>4</sup>Kolossar 3,4

\* † ἡμῶν B(\*) D<sup>1</sup> H 0278. 1739 M sy sa; Meth Ambr (ὑμῶν is replace with ἡμῶν)

| txt P46 ⋈ C D\* F G P Ψ 075. 33. 81. 104. 365. 945. 1881 pc lat<sup>bo</sup>; Cyp (A illeg.)

\* A 1881. 2464 pc (the prepositional phrase σὺν αὐτῷ is omitted by these manuscripts)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 527.]

Do not think only.” (v. 2, φρονεῖτε) focus on the present as an ongoing responsibility. The two present tense imperative verb forms stress continuous responsibility, not moment responsibility. Out of this dying/rising moment in conversion comes the continuing obligation to adopt these two stances of seeking after and focusing attention.

Additionally, the theological declaration “your real life is hidden with Christ in God” (ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ Θεῷ) in v. 3 alludes to the present reality of our spiritual life that comes out of the death experience; the Greek perfect tense verb asserts this. The Greek perfect tense had a different meaning than the English perfect tense does today. In ancient Greek the perfect tense stressed an event occurrence that produced a continuing impact or consequence which extended at least into present time and perhaps beyond into the future. Thus Paul’s use of κέκρυπται in the perfect tense signals that in conversion this new resurrection life given to us is covered and not visible to the human eye, because it is a spiritual reality. And also the hiddenness of this life continues, in terms of the core spiritual reality. The false teachers wanted to concretize it through religious ritual, but Paul denies the possibility of such. But this does not in any way suggest non-existence of this spiritual life. Against the Greek dualism mind-set of that world, Paul’s assertion conveys just the opposite implication, since in Platonic dualism the ultimate reality was found in the invisible realm rather than in what was visible. From these words of Paul the Colossians listeners to this statement would have understood him to argue that this hidden life is

the ultimately real spiritual existence. The outward show in religious ritualism advocated by the false teachers was focused in this corrupted and non-lasting visible realm of this world, which clearly signaled phoniness and worthlessness.

**Future Time.** The reference to the Second Coming of Christ in verse 4, “when Christ ... is revealed to the whole world” (ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ), points to an undefined moment in the future. The indefinite adverbial relative pronoun ὅταν refuses to project a definite time in which the return of Christ is anticipated. This is further augmented by the subjunctive mood of the Greek verb φανερωθῆ, which stresses this appearing as a possibility sometime in the future.

Thus the entirety of the Christian experience is set forth here:

*Past:*

*Conversion: 1. A death experience; 2. A resurrection experience*

*Present:*

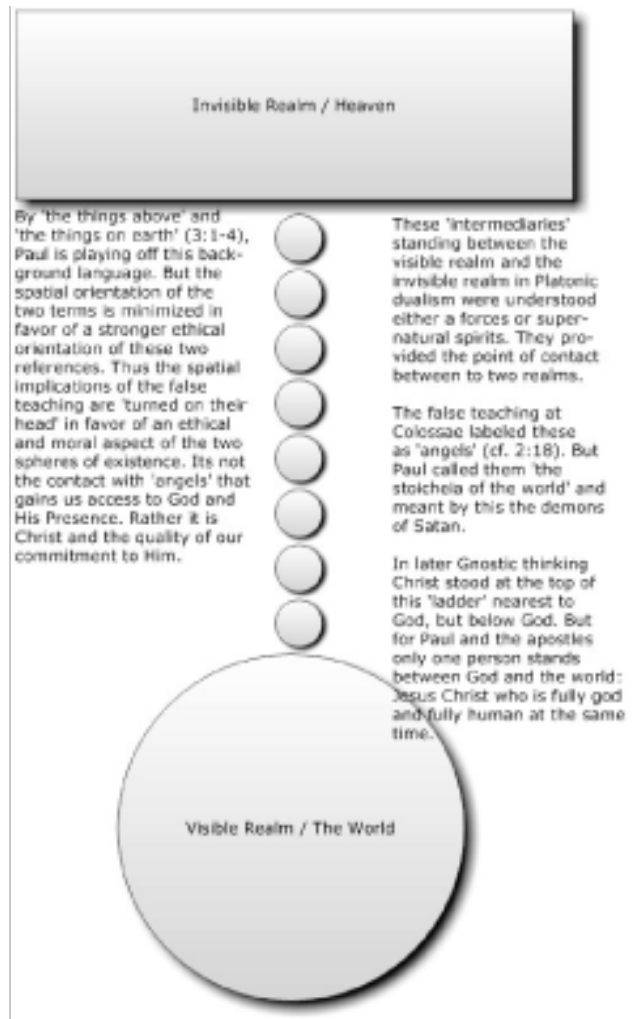
*Obligations: 1. Seek the ‘above things’ 2. set one’s mind on the ‘above things’.*

*Spiritual reality: our life stands hidden with Christ in God.*

*Future:*

*Second Coming: 1) Christ revealed to entire world; 2) believers revealed in the very presence of God.*

Consequently this passage is packed full of significant theological affirmation about the basic nature of Christian salvation. These affirmations cover the complete spectrum of beginning to end of religious experience in Christian teaching. Consistent with, and summarizing of, chapters one and two, the experience of the believer centers in Christ completely, and exclusively. The death and resurrection of Christ is the basis of the believer’s death to sin and resurrection to new life in conversion. Coming out of that is a spiritual life and living that stands hidden from the unbelieving world, and exists with God in actuality through spiritual union with



Christ. The visible aspect of this ‘invisible’ spiritual life is expressed by the priorities that govern the believer’s behavior and life style: the things above. This experience comes to its climax in the Second Coming of Christ. That moment will be a ‘revealing’ action. Christ will be revealed to the entire world as the Son of God. But the believers will also be revealed as existing in the very *Shekhinah* presence of Almighty God Himself. The Christ, who is our very life (ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν), becomes the basis of our existence in the Presence of God.

The **space markers** are also theologically focused. They revolve about “the things above” (τὰ ἄνω) and “the things on earth” (τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). The latter is relatively easy to understand; what belongs to this material world is the intended reference, especially that which stands in opposition to God and represents corruption of the world that God created. Thus the ethical aspect of these contrasting references plays a major role, making them much more than mere spatial designations. Some argue that these two terms are almost purely ethical, rather than spatial. But this doesn’t seem to be the case contextually.

The language suggests some of the background terminology used in the false teaching between the visible and invisible worlds implicit in the rigid demands made to follow rules and to worship supposed angels standing between these two realms. The apostle takes over the terms and then re-defines them with radically different meaning. Such an approach is relatively typical in the Pauline letters of the New Testament. It remains even in our world a good strategy for advocating one’s ideas in contrast to opposing ones.

### **Literary Aspects:**

The literary shift represented in 3:1-4 represents an important source for clear understanding of the ideas of the text.

#### **Literary Form:**

At the **broad genre** level this passage is a part of the letter body, and assumes the ‘occasional writing’ trait that typified the writing of letters in the ancient world. The admonitions contained in the passage relate to needs present in the church at Colossae, and the way these admonitions are expressed is determined in large measure by the situation at Colossae. Thus Paul employment of more abstract philosophically oriented terminology reflects the influence of this kind of thinking in the Lycus Valley. Thus Paul seeks to communicate to these readers in terms they could understand.

At the **narrow genre** level, this passage represents ‘epistolary paraenesis.’<sup>5</sup> This type of moral exhortation characterizes the so-called ‘practical’ section at the end of the letter body of many of the letters in the New Testament. In several of Paul’s letters the first major section of the letter body deals with the ideas of Christianity in terms of a structure of belief. The second major division is the epistolary paraenesis material advocating specific patterns of behavior and life style.<sup>6</sup> Conceptually the guidelines for behavior grew out of the conceptual ideas presented first. In modern circles these are typically labeled the ‘doctrinal’ material and the ‘practical’ material. This is easily identified by looking at the outline of the NT letter given by the commentator in his or her commentary book. The second section will most always be labeled something to the effect of ‘practical section.’ Sometimes in modern thinking the two sections of material are separated from one another as though they possessed little connection. Religion doing and religious thinking, activism and doctrine, etc. are modern labels attached to these types of material, and the labels can imply an artificial distancing between the concepts. But this is completely false understanding from the New Testament writers perspectives. What we do as Christians grows out of who we are spiritually as Christians. Otherwise we fall prey to the same wrong thinking being advocated by the false teachers in the Lycus Valley.

Col. 3:1-4 represents the first unit of the exhortation to Christian living section in 3:1-4:6 of the letter.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>For the distinction between ‘paraenetic style’ and ‘epistolary paraenesis’ see Colossians study 5.1 on Col. 2:6-15. The latter stresses a block section of moral admonition grouped together in one section of an ancient letter. The paraenetic style signals occasional moral admonitions inserted into narrative or teaching material with a doctrinal or conceptual focus in the larger unit.

<sup>6</sup>In ancient Greek rhetoric, the first section was known as the *argumentatio* material, and the second part as the *exhortatio* material.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest Martin correctly urges caution in over emphasizing this distinction between the doctrinal and the practical:

“Outlines of Colossians traditionally show a major shift from doctrinal to practical matters at 3:1. Indeed Colossians, along with Romans (12:1) and Ephesians (4:1), and unlike 1 Peter, has an identifiable point of transition (3:1). But labeling chapters 1–2 as doctrinal and 3–4 as practical greatly oversimplifies the flow of the letter. In typical Pauline style, theology and ethics are not neatly separated. Paul intends them to be as inseparable as the hardware and software of a computer. Watch for theological affirmations mingled with ethical instructions in chapters 3–4.” [Ernest D. Martin, *Colossians, Philemon*, Believers Church Bible Commentary

Additionally, 3:1-4 stand as a foundational expression to the remainder of the exhortations. Plus it pulls together the ideas in 2:6-23 with what follows in 3:5-4:6. In ancient Greek rhetoric this was known as the *peroratio* section.<sup>8</sup> Thus it is a 'bridge' passage in much the same role as 2:6-7 plays.<sup>9</sup>

One needs to raise the question as the nature of the moral admonitions present in 3:1-4:6. In modern ethics, the issue of the nature of exhortation is often raised. Do they constitute strict rules and / or laws that must be obeyed with the imposition of severe penalty for failure to obey? Or, do these admonitions constitute 'guidelines' over against 'laws'? Even still, do they stand only as 'suggestions'? The answer to this is not always easy and crystal clear. But answering the question becomes important here in light of the "laws" (δογματίζεσθε, 2:20; τοῖς δόγμασιν, 2:14) being imposed by the false teachers. Paul's rejection of the legitimacy of their demands points to religious legalism having no validity what so ever in biblical Christian practice. And this is consistent with his rejection of the legalistic system of Judaism that he had followed in his pre-Christian days as a Pharisee, as is reflected in his declarations in Gal. 2:16, Rom. 4:3-5.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the structuring of the admonitions in the paraenetic sections in his letters stands closer to the Old Testament '*apodeictic law*' structure rather than in the '*casuistic law*' pattern.<sup>11</sup> OT *apodeictic law* specified God's will, but did not indicate specific punishments to be imposed for disobedience. But in the New Covenant experience of Christianity one has to be careful about making rigid laws out of these admonitions. Both Jesus and the apostles present the admonitions as God's expectation for His people. Certainly failure to follow them does not require human agents, such as church leaders, to impose fines or other types of penalties, as was the case with the OT *casuistic laws*.<sup>12</sup> But when stated as God's expectation, these admonitions carry clearly the implication that failure to follow them brings God's displeasure upon the individual. And this displeasure will be expressed in divine punishment both in this life, and clearly on the Day of Judgment at the end of time.

Were Paul to implement new Christian 'rules' (τὰ δόγματα) with these exhortations, he would stand in contradiction to himself, and be rather hypocritical by rejecting the rules of the false teachers and then advocate necessary rules of his own. Paul's wisdom was deeper than this. Out of his own experience, he

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(Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1993), 133]

<sup>8</sup>"The short section of four verses commencing with the words εἰ οὖν συνηγερθητε τῷ Χριστῷ ('since therefore you were raised with Christ') serves as an important transition piece in the letter (cf Grässer, ZTK 64 [1967] 146, Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrieff*, 30, 31, Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 60–62, Schweizer, 130, 131). On the one hand, it rounds off what has been said previously serving as the conclusion to the author's polemic against the 'philosophy' of the false teachers (2:8–23) and presenting the true alternative to that teaching (Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 61). On the other hand, it marks a new beginning spelling out programmatically the inferences of the preceding for the walk of believers (Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrieff*, 30). So the οὖν ('therefore,' v 1, cf vv 5, 12) indicates that what follows is connected with the train of thought previously developed (cf the similar function of the conjunction at Rom 12:1; Eph 4:1)." /Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 158.]

<sup>9</sup>"The gospel is normally stated in indicatives (e.g., Christ died for our sins; he was raised from the dead). But the gospel also contains imperatives (e.g., be reconciled; be holy). The imperatives of the gospel of Christ grow out of the indicatives. Exhortations about life spring from the foundation of Christology. In Colossians we hear the call to become in daily experience what we are in Christ." [Ernest D. Martin, *Colossians, Philemon*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1993), 133]

<sup>10</sup>**Gal. 2:16 (NRSV):** "And yet we Jewish Christians know that we become right with God, not by doing what the law commands, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be accepted by God because of our faith in Christ -- and not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be saved by obeying the law."

εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ.

Rom. 4:3-5 (NRSV): "3 For the Scriptures tell us, 'Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous.' 4 When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. 5 But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work."

3 τί γὰρ ἡ γραφὴ λέγει; Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραάμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην. 4 τῷ δὲ ἐργαζομένῳ ὁ μισθὸς οὐ λογίζεται κατὰ χάριν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ὀφειλὴν· 5 τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ, πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιούντα τὸν ἄσεβῆ, λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην,

<sup>11</sup>"Apodeictic law: According to scholars, one of the two types of biblical law. (The other type is casuistic law). Apodeictic laws tend to use the I-You form as in the familiar "you shall" and "you shall not" (see Exod 23.20; Lev 19.17–18). The distinction was first introduced by Albrecht Alt, for whom casuistic law is secular, while apodeictic is sacral (see "The Origins of Israelite Law" in *Essays on Old Testament Religion* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1968], pp. 101-71)." [Glossary of Biblical Interpretation online]

<sup>12</sup>Closely connected to this is the matter of the biblically demanded 'church discipline' of wayward believers. But it remains 'discipline' and not 'punishment', thus distinguishing itself from divine mandated punishment to be implemented by human agents. For more details see "Church Discipline," bible.org online.

came to realize that religious legalism is ultimately worthless for both the individual and before God. His understanding of Christian obligation in matters of behavior and life style grows out of the relationship that one has with Christ, not by imposing, from the outside, rules and regulations. God's grace is presented not as passive beneficence to sinners, but instead as a powerful, dynamic influence of God upon the living of the believer.<sup>13</sup> Couple this with the leadership of God's Spirit in the believer,<sup>14</sup> and one experiences powerful motives toward living within the framework of these admonitions. Additionally is the motivation arising from the awareness that a Day of Judgment lies ahead in which every believer will have their life thoroughly examined by God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1-10). Thus the admonitions of 3:1-4:6 stand as 'guide posts' pointing the way to proper conduct of one's life as a believer. God in the leading of His Spirit in the believer's life will guide the individual in the paths laid out by the admonitions.

**Literary Setting:**

The letter body focuses upon Christ (1:9-23), Paul's ministry (1:24-2:5), and Christian living (2:6-23) in the so-called doctrinal section. Col. 3:1-4 moves the emphasis into patterns of behavior beginning with the foundational principle of seeking Heavenly things as a spiritually resurrected believer. Coming off this foundation will be the stress on 'putting to death' the old sinful life (3:5-11), clothing oneself with Christian qualities (3:12-17), developing Christian family relationships (3:18-4:1), and miscellaneous Christian responsibilities to both insiders and outsiders (4:2-6). Thus, as a transition text, Col. 3:1-4 pulls together the idea of Christian living based upon clearly defined relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

**Literary Structure:**

The block diagram of the original Greek text visually presents the inner relationships of the ideas in these three verses. The literalistic English translation of the Greek below illustrates this connection:

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3.1      Therefore
          since you have been raised together with Christ,
25  be seeking the things above,
          where Christ is
                                     at the right hand of God
                                     sitting;

26  3.2 set your minds on the things above,

27  not --- on the things upon the earth.
      3.3      For
28  you died,
          and
29  your life is hidden
                                     together with Christ
                                     in God;

      3.4      whenever Christ is revealed
  
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**Outline of Colossians**

**Praescriptio**

Introduction: 1:1-2  
 Superscriptio: 1:1  
 Adscriptio: 1:2a  
 Salutatio: 1:2b

**Proem**

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

**Body**

Intercession: 1:9-12  
 Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20  
 Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul's Ministry 1: 1:24-29  
 Paul's Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15  
 Christian Living 2: 2:16-19  
 Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

**Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4**

Christian Behavior: 3:5-11  
 Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1  
 Husband/Wife: 3:18-19  
 Father/Children: 3:20-21  
 Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

**Conclusio**

Tychicus: 4:7-9  
 Greetings: 4:10-17  
 Closing: 4:18  
 Letter Validation: 4:18a  
 Prayer Request: 4:18b  
 Benedictio: 4:19c

<sup>13</sup>For a detailed discussion see Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., "Grace," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* online.

<sup>14</sup>For example, see Gal. 5:16-26 for Paul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

then |  
together with Him  
your life  
also  
30 **you will be revealed**  
in glory.

Clearly the passage is composed of two segments: three admonitions (#s 25-27) and a threefold rationale defending the admonitions (#s 28-30), thus achieving some rhetorical balance.

The three admonitions are arranged in a twofold manner. The first one, # 25, admonishes the readers (2nd person plural verb) to make a practice of ‘seeking’ the things above. In amplification and elaboration of this encouragement, the next two, #s. 26-27, repeat the essential idea in the positive strophe of # 26 with a different verb, ‘set your minds on,’ but with the same direct object. The converse, negative strophe follows specifying a prohibition against ‘setting’ one’s mind on earthly things, the conceptual opposite of the things above. Thus the essential idea is singular in nature and is directly stated by admonitions 25 and 26. This is re-enforced by stating the opposite in abbreviated form with admonition 27.

The rationale defending these admonitions is introduced by the causal conjunction γάρ, meaning ‘for’ in English. The threefold amplification of the basis for the admonitions follows a past, present, and tense time frame of Christian experience, as the verb sequence beautifully illustrates: aorist, perfect, future tense verbs. **The Christian life began** with ‘death’ (# 28). The believer experienced a personal death to sin and to self in coming to Christ in conversion. **The Christian life is currently being experienced** as a ‘hidden’ life with Christ in God (# 29). The use of the Greek perfect tense verb, over against the present tense verb, highlights dramatically that this hiddenness comes out of the death experience. It is spiritual life in God that is based upon spiritual union with Christ. **The Christian life will be validated** at the Second Coming of Christ (# 30). When Christ is revealed as the Son of God at the close of human history, those in union with Him will also be revealed as living in the very Shekhinah Presence of Almighty God through their union with Christ. Thus because of this spiritual experience with God through Christ, the ongoing focus of the believer’s life and living should be upon the Heavenly issues.

### Exegesis of the Text:

#### **Get your focus right, vv. 1-2:**

1 So if 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,”

3.1 Εἰ οὖν συνηγήρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθημένος· 2 τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπι τῆς γῆς,

The first admonition is couched in the ancient first class Greek conditional sentence form. The protasis, the ‘if’ clause, reaches back to 2:12 with the image of spiritual resurrection in conversion as reflected in one’s baptism.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, this ‘if’ clause stands in a complementary role to the death image in 2:20.<sup>16</sup> Thus with 2:20 and 3:1, there stands the death / resurrection motif so basic to Paul’s thinking. The implications of beginning the sentence with this conditional structure contain at least the following. The if clause establishes an important connecting link to the ‘doctrinal’ discussion of at least 2:6-23, if not of the entire first section of the letter body, 1:9-2:23. By the use of this ‘catch phrase’ Paul builds the main clause admonition off the implications of this prior discussion.

This is directly affirmed by the inferential conjunction οὖν, **therefore**, in verse one. The material introduced in 3:1 makes explicit what is considered to be implied in the preceding material.

The second identifiable implication is that this linking process reflects a traditional Pauline view that <sup>15</sup>Col. 2:12 (NRSV): “when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγήρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν

<sup>16</sup>Col. 2:20 (NRSV): “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?”

Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε·

Christian living grows out of spiritual relationship with Christ. Telling people how to live without clarifying to them the starting point of spiritual union with Christ is to reduce Christianity to the worthless legalism that the apostle experienced in Judaism prior to his conversion. In the context of this letter to the Colossians and the immediately preceding discussion of false teaching, this connecting clause stresses even further that the idea of Christian practice advocated by these teachers had no legitimacy and could not lead to a life style acceptable to God. Thus he is setting the stage to offer the true corrective to their false claims.

The one questionable implication drawn by a few commentators is that the common conditional sentence structure between 2:20 and 3:1 extends the 'doctrinal discussion' through 3:4. This failure to correctly analyze the conceptual flow of ideas comes about by focusing more on the 'if' clauses, the protasis, than on the exhortations in the main clauses, the apodosis. In my estimation, the scholars making this mistake in their commentaries also tend to reflect either lack of literary analysis skills or else a complete overlooking of the literary aspects of the text. By linking it backwards instead of forward, they greatly diminish the role of 3:1-4 as foundational principle for the *paraenesis* that follows in 3:5-4:6.<sup>17</sup>

The admonition, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος), calls clearly for a prioritizing of one's life.<sup>18</sup> The verb ζητεῖτε underscores putting one's attention and efforts toward a goal. Passionate commitment is also included in the verb idea.<sup>19</sup> The present tense imperative Greek verb ζητεῖτε calls for an ongoing, continuous seeking after Heavenly things. Spotty or occasional seeking is excluded from this.

The meaning of 'things above' is defined by the relative clause, "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God," οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος. Clearly the reference is to Heavenly values and priorities. Quite naturally, with the central role that Christ has played in conversion, one would want to focus attention on Him in Christian living. And the resurrected Christ now resides in Heaven, and is at the hand of authority and power from God the Father. Peter O'Brien provides a helpful explanation of the background here in Psalm 110:1:<sup>20</sup>

οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος. The basic reason for seeking the heavenly realm is that this is "where Christ is." Grammatically this clause spells out the place and character of ἄνω ("above," cf Schweizer, 132), but it also provides the ground and motivation for the Christians seeking the things above (von Soden, 58). Paul is not indicating an interest in some cosmic geography, nor is he encouraging the pursuit of "that which is above" for its own sake. The significance of this realm, closely related to the sphere of resurrection existence, is that the exalted Christ is at its center.

The phrase ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος ("seated at God's right hand"; with most commentators ἐστὶν, "is," should not be connected with καθήμενος "seated," so making a periphrastic tense, but separated from the participle by a comma; there are two dependent clauses, cf 2:3 and the similar comment regarding εἰσὶν ... ἀπόκρυφοί) is an allusion to Psalm 110:1. Paul takes up the Christological interpretation of this psalm, which was common in the early church, to speak of Christ's session at God's right hand and so to define further the realm above which is to be the goal of the Colossians' striving (cf J. Daniélou, "La Session à la droite du Père," *Studia*

<sup>17</sup>The most surprising commentator to do this is Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 151-53: "Probatio—Argument Two—The Bone of Contention—2:6–3:4"

<sup>18</sup>"Set your hearts translates the Greek 'seek' (RSV), which is further expanded in verse 2 by *keep your minds fixed*. No hard and fast distinction is intended: desires and thoughts, wishing and thinking, the whole of the emotional and intellectual energy is to be directed toward the above, that is, heaven, where Christ reigns at God's right side. It is evident that Paul is not advocating an attitude of utter disregard for everyday responsibilities and duties which are laid upon believers; he is saying that their ultimate concern is with heavenly realities and values, determined by the presence and power of the risen Christ, who shares in the sovereign power of God." [Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Helps for translators; UBS handbook series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 73]

<sup>19</sup>"to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective, *strive for, aim (at), try to obtain, desire, wish (for); desire to possess τὶ someth* (Lucian, *Hermot*. 66 τ. εὐδαιμονίαν; Just., <sup>D</sup>. 102, 6 σωτηρίαν καὶ βοήθειαν) τ. βασιλείαν **Mt 6:33; Lk 12:31**. εὐκαιρίαν **Mt 26:16; Lk 22:6**. ψευδομαρτυρίαν **Mt 26:59; cp Mk 14:55**. τὴν δόξαν **J 5:44; 7:18; 8:50a**. τιμὴν κ. ἀφαρσίαν **Ro 2:7; cp 1 Cor 7:27b; 2 Cor 12:14; Col 3:1; 1 Pt 3:11** (Ps 33:15)."

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 428]

<sup>20</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 164.



Evangelica. ed. K. Aland and others [TU 73; Berlin: Akademie, 1959] 689–98, D. M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*. Psalm 110 in *Early Christianity* [SBLM 18; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973], M. Gourgues. *A la droite de Dieu* [Paris: Gabalda, 1978] 57–63, and W. R. G. Loader, “Christ at the right hand—Ps. cx. 1 in the New Testament,” *NTS* 24 [1977–78] 199–217).

Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God was an essential and regular element in the early apostolic preaching, finding echoes throughout the NT (Acts 2:33–35; 5:31; 7:55, 56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev. 3:21). This goes back to the messianic interpretation of Psalm 110:1: “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.’” Jesus claimed these words for himself when he was brought before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Matt 26:64; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:41–44). After his resurrection and ascension the apostolic announcement was that this enthronement had taken place. Christ ruled from the right hand of God and would continue to do so until all his enemies had submitted to him (1 Cor 15:25).

Believers are then admonished to continue their focus on Christ all through their journey through life, not just at conversion. From His position of authority in Heaven Christ is able to assist and guide the believer through life’s challenges.

What we passionately desire then is to live a life on this earth that reflects the Heavenly values affirmed and validated by the risen and exalted Christ sitting at the side of power and authority with the Heavenly Father. Here is a value system far superior to the fleshly religion advocated by the false teachers in the Lycus Valley. These values are life transforming as well as dynamic forces in our day to day living. Paul wants the Colossian believers to implement these values into their lives. And we need to do the same thing!

The second and third admonitions in v. 2 repeat and highlight the first one by repeating the same idea with slightly different words, and by prohibiting the opposite of the first exhortation: τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. The core verb φρονεῖτε stresses a focusing of one’s mind on something, and this leads to a wilful commitment to acquiring it.<sup>21</sup> The negative prohibition forbids taking one’s focus away from Christ and putting it on earthly things. Rom. 8:5–8 provides insight here:

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law — indeed it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

5 οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σὰρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος. 6 τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη· 7 διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν, τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται· 8 οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες θεῷ ἀρέσαι οὐ δύναται.

To focus ‘on the flesh’ is virtually the same as to focus ‘on the things upon the earth.’ The believer takes his attention off Christ and brings disaster spiritually upon himself.

What a different way of living Paul sets forth here! The materialistic oriented Christianity so common in our world represents a flat denial of Paul’s understanding. Materialism and secularism control much of American Christianity in all sectors of theological positions from the far left to the far right. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s idea of ‘cheap grace’ permeates so much of Christianity. There is little tolerance for suffering religious persecution; a preoccupation with material accumulation at the expense of spiritual maturity and insight; an insane pursuit of pleasure with paranoid avoidance of pain. With our ‘flesh’ based religious display through man-made rituals and shallow pietistic display, we indeed are focused much more on τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς than on τὰ ἄνω! Oh that our God would raise up an army of His servants who understand and apply Paul’s teachings. Thanks be to

<sup>21</sup>“φρονέω (one of several words derived from the stem φρην-) appears no fewer than twenty-three times in Paul out of a total of twenty-six occurrences in the NT. As a rather neutral term it acquires its proper meaning from its immediate context and covers a range such as to ‘think,’ ‘judge,’ and ‘give one’s mind to’ (cf. Goetzmann, in NIDNTT 2, 616). However, several of the Pauline contexts (e.g. Rom 8:5–8 where the cognate φρόνημα [‘way of thinking,’ ‘aim’] also occurs) make it plain that the way one thinks is intimately related to the way one lives (whether as a Christian in the Spirit and by faith, or in the flesh, in sin and in spiritual death). ‘A man’s thinking and striving cannot be seen in isolation from the overall direction of his life; the latter will be reflected in the aims which he sets himself’ (Goetzmann, in NIDNTT 2, 617). φρονέω thus expresses not simply an activity of the intellect, but also a movement of the will; it has to do with aims and the motives underlying them. So in addition to the range of meanings mentioned above, to ‘set one’s mind on,’ ‘be intent on,’ and ‘be minded or disposed’ (cf. BAG, 866) must also be included (the AV/KJV rendering ‘set your affection’ is misleading today since it gives the impression the verb primarily has to do with a person’s emotional state).” [O’Brien, WBC, *ibid.*, 165.]

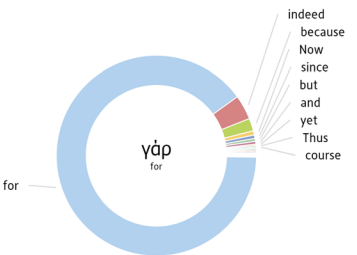
God that such is beginning to happen in isolated places around our world. And the Christianity that emerges in these places is powerful and dynamic so that lives are changed profoundly and for all eternity. There is indeed a basis for optimism that in the coming days a new revitalized Christianity will emerge based on these principles laid down by Paul in this passage.

**Here's why, vv. 3-4:**

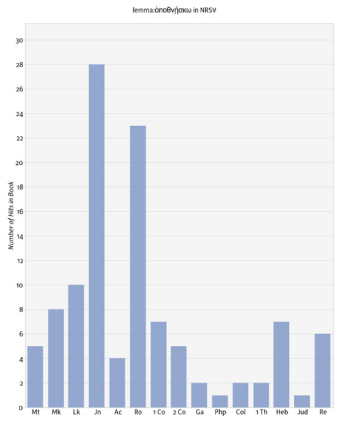
3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory

3 ἀπεθάνετε γάρ, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ· 4 ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῇ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.

The threefold reason (γάρ) for maintaining one's focus on Christ is set forth as your conversion, your Christian life now, and your future experience at the Return of Christ. These cover the full range of Christian experience and thus serve as powerful incentives for living the kind of Christian life that Paul describes here in verses one and two. The coordinate causal conjunction γάρ sets up these three statements as the basis for the admonitions in the first two verses.<sup>22</sup> Adopting this proposed way of living the Christian life rests on the foundation of what happened, is happening, and will happen to us as believers in Christ. Paul makes a powerful appeal to his readers to adhere to his admonitions with these three declarations in verses three and four.



**Past:** ἀπεθάνετε.<sup>23</sup> Conversion to Christ is a 'death experience.' Of the 111 uses of the verb ἀποθνήσκω in the New Testament, two of them surface in Colossians and both function at the figurative level denoting spiritual dying rather than physically dying at the literal meaning. Here in 3:3 the reference to dying is a reference to the conversion moment as defined by the use of the Aorist tense form of the verb. The same is also true with the longer phrase in 2:20, ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, you died with Christ from the control of the elemental spirits of the world. The repetition of just the verb in 3:3 implies the details stated in 2:20.<sup>24</sup> In the longer expression, this death experience has two important aspects. It is a dying σὺν Χριστῷ, and it is a dying ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου. Spiritual dying is not something the individual achieves themselves and on their own. Authentic



<sup>22</sup>The Greek conjunction γάρ is used some 879 times in the New Testament to express different simple, straight forward usage where the statements introduced by the conjunction become the corollaries that precede in the first two verses.

<sup>23</sup>“The importance of gaining firm hold on this new perspective is so important that Paul and Timothy restate the point afresh, summing up once again the twofold consequence of the Colossian believers’ identification with Christ. ‘You died!’ ‘With Christ’ (2:20) is not included here, though clearly implied, in order that the point can be made in all its starkness. Here again there is, of course, no suggestion that a literal death has taken place (other than Christ’s). The aorist is simply a powerful metaphor for the fact that when they believed in Christ in baptism they were putting their previous way of life to death and having it buried out of sight. Consequently, it should no longer be a factor in their new way of life. They have been freed by that one act to live a quite different kind of life, determined not by their old fears and loyalties but by their new and primary loyalty to Christ and by the enabling which comes from on high (1:11, 29). The fact that no irreversible change has taken place (begun but not completed) is sufficiently indicated by the exhortations which immediately follow (3:5). The rhetorical character of the bare aorist formulation here, as also at the beginning of chapters 6, 7, and 8 of Romans, needs to be recognized. Its object is to ensure that the change of perspective marked by conversion-initiation is final and fixed. Nevertheless, throughout this section the balance between past act, ongoing outworking, and future completion is maintained (cf. Lona 179–89; Wedderburn, *Baptism* 75–76).” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 206.]

<sup>24</sup>“ἀπεθάνετε should be rendered ‘you died’ for it points back to the specific occasion of their union with Christ in his death (rather than ‘you have died,’ RSV or ‘you are dead’); it picks up the statement of chapter 2:20, ‘you died (ἀπεθάνετε) with Christ from the elemental spirits of the universe’ and harks back to the ideas expressed in chapter 2:11, 12, ‘you were circumcised ... in the circumcision of Christ ... you were buried with him,’ at the same time providing the basis for the imperative in the exhortatory section, ‘put to death’ (3:5). This death with Christ involves a dying to the elemental spirits and by implication to what has been designated τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (‘the things on earth’), the content of which is spelled out, in part at least, in chapter 2:16–23 with its references to ascetic regulations, visionary experiences and the like.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 165.]

spiritual dying must take place in close connection (σὺν) with Christ and His redeeming death on the cross. Only through this intimate connection with Christ's death can we as individuals undergo the spiritual death that is critical to our salvation. Also this spiritual dying is a separation from (ἀπὸ) τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, which for Paul signals the powerful demonic world that reigns over this world. In our dying we came out from under their control and influence. Now once freed from that powerful influence we must live a life distanced from their demands and corrupting influences. And this means to die to the things of the world. They are to lose their appeal and their influence over our life.

The false teachers failed to grasp this and sought to substitute rigid self-disciplined legalism as the means to counteract the lure of the world. Their setting up rigid rules and regulations based on dietary laws and the religious calendar with its resulting rituals based on celebrations of weeks, months and years attempted to impose a type of self-discipline over believers to stem the corrupting influences of the fallen nature. Paul knew that such was worthless effort and told them so in 2:23, "they are of no value in checking self-indulgence" οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τιμὴ πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός. The corrective to the appeal of the world is the realization that one has already died to the world in coming to Christ. In that personal death, the believer became participant in Christ's death on the cross and thus experiences the liberating power of the cross over sin and Satan. It is that spiritual power, not human based self-discipline, that will enable one to live victorious over worldly passions.

**Present:** καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ. Coming out of this dying to self and with Christ on the cross is a spiritual life that exists in a powerfully real way with Christ in the very presence of God. But it is hidden (κέκρυπται) to the non-believing world who can't grasp such spiritual reality because of not ever having gone through a personal death experience. Outsiders can't see how one can successfully conquer flesh and worldliness apart from imposing rigid rules and regulations on the individual. But the spiritual reality is that worldliness stands already conquered by Christ and by keeping one's focus on Christ<sup>25</sup> that liberating power provides victory over temptation all through life. This liberating power flows out of Heaven, and not from the self-determination of the individual.

The perfect tense verb form κέκρυπται underscores a moment of hiding with the resulting condition of hiddenness coming out of it. The concept reaches back to 2:13 with the statement καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας [ἐν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, **συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ**, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα, and when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made you alive together with him**, when he forgave us all our trespasses. In conversion we came alive spiritually, and the life given us is powerfully linked to the resurrection life of Christ. At its core this life is spiritual and not material in nature. It is so linked to Christ that at the beginning of the third reason Christ is defined as our life: ὁ Χριστός..., ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν. Our spiritual existence is found purely in union with Christ.<sup>26</sup>

How can our spiritual life be hidden when we are supposed to be witnesses to the power of the Gospel? Clearly the idea of a hidden spiritual life does not imply a secret Christian life. Against the dualistic thinking of the world of Paul and the Colossians, this hiddenness stresses its location in the invisible realm, and, in that day, such stressed its ultimate reality and permanent nature. It was a real life, in contrast to the deceptive spiritual life taught by the false teachers that was based on fleshly human accomplishment in the visible world of corruption and transitory existence.

<sup>25</sup>Note the appositional phrase. In verse 3 is 'your life' and in verse 4, Christ is 'your life.' A clear reflection of **Gal. 2:19-20**, "19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; 20 and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

19 ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω· Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι· 20 ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ.

<sup>26</sup>"The believer's life is said to be hidden σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ ('with Christ in God'). The expression 'in God,' the very antithesis to what is material and visible, is used rather rarely by Paul and the only precise parallels to the believers being 'in God' are 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 (at Rom 2:17; 5:11 it is the rejoicing [καυχῶμαι] in God which is in view; cf. 1 Thess 2:2 and Eph 3:9). The phrase 'in God' modifies both 'life' (ζωή) and the immediately preceding words 'with Christ' (σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ); elsewhere in the Pauline letters this phrase [using the preposition by itself; it is different with verbs compounded with σὺν] occurs only of future existence, cf. Moule, RevExp 70 [1973] 485; on the meaning of this expression see the following note): our life is hidden with Christ because we died with him and have been raised with him to new life; 'in God' because Christ himself has his being in God and those who belong to Christ have their being there too (cf. Bruce, 261; Grundmann, TDNT 7, 785). Centered in God means that the hidden life is secure, unable to be touched by anyone." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 166.]

But modern western thinking has reversed this association of what is real and unreal so that the real is linked to the visible, material world today. Reality in today's world is defined by the various senses of hearing, tasting, touching, seeing, etc. So how do we know that this hidden life is real against the pattern of thinking in our world? Several signals affirmed by Paul in this letter provide some insight. The initial affirmation of the moment of hiding of this new life is found in baptism, as Paul asserts clearly in 2:12, συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, *when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.* The very visible action of public water baptism that affirms our spiritual death and resurrection openly signals that this new spiritual life has come about in the individual being baptized. Additionally, the shape of the Christian lifestyle that Paul will place on the table in 3:5 through 4:6 reflects the religious and moral impact of this new spiritual life on our behavior and relationships with other people, both inside and outside the community of believers. These are very visible and noticeable by other people. This lifestyle built on the foundation of the spiritual principles here in 3:1-4 stands in dramatic contrast with the alternative proposed by the false teachers. Their idea was that the outward visibility of the Christian life was to be found in open adherence to specific religious rituals and observances. Paul recognized the falseness of this as an empty substitute religious life to the genuine Christian life in the Gospel, and thus he totally rejected it.

**Future:** ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ. All of this will find its ultimate validation at the second coming of Christ. That day will reveal two things (φανερωθῆ... φανερωθήσεσθε): 1) Christ will be revealed to the world as the Son of God; 2) believers will be revealed as those who live in the very Presence of the Holy God of Abraham.<sup>27</sup> At that moment it will be clear to all the world that Christ indeed stands as the exalted Son of God claiming full authority and power from the Heavenly Father. And also that those who have focused their lives on Him will stand unmistakably as the true people of God invited into the full presence and mighty of the God of this universe.

The second coming of Christ is here defined as ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, *when Christ is revealed.* The Aorist subjunctive verb form φανερωθῆ combined with the indefinite relative adverb ὅταν project a future moment in time when this disclosure event will take place. To read into this an assumed 'realized eschatology' that posits this action in the past coming of Christ is completely unacceptable and baseless. Clearly Paul is pointing to a future moment in time as the moment of disclosure.<sup>28</sup>

The return of Christ signals many things across the pages of the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> The aspect Paul chose to emphasize here in light of the position of the false teachers at Colossae is the validation of this hidden spiritual life by the return of Christ.<sup>30</sup> He has already stressed the believer's experience of Christian hope: 1:5, *hope laid up in Heaven*, ἣν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς; 1:23, *the hope promised by the gospel that you heard*, τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε; 1:27, *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*, ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης. The expectation of future blessing from God through Christ is the heart of this hope. And this is centered in the divine Presence, ἐν δόξῃ (cf. also 1:27, ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης). The privilege and blessing of the return of Christ is that this hidden life already being lived out in the Divine Presence now in limited fashion will be elevated to full privilege and blessing in the presence of God for all

<sup>27</sup>Christ is now enthroned in heaven at God's right hand. When he appears at the end of days at the Parousia, it will become plain that his own are with him. The day of the revelation of the Son of God will be the day of the revelation of the sons of God (the position of σὺν αὐτῷ lays stress on the closeness of the relation of "you" and "him," as well as keeping ἐν δόξῃ in a position of final emphasis, so Williams, 124), as Paul makes plain with his "then" (τότε which is emphatic pointing to the same time or occasion specified in the ὅταν clause, i.e. when Christ is revealed), the additional words "you also" (καὶ ὑμεῖς) and his selection of the same verb "reveal" (φανερώω) to apply to the believers themselves as well as to Christ. That manifestation will take place "in glory" (ἐν δόξῃ)." [O'Brien, WBC, 169]

<sup>28</sup>In 1:26, Paul indicates that the mystery of the Gospel has already been disclosed (τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν,— νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ) by his use of the Aorist passive indicative mood verb form, in contrast to the subjunctive form in 3:4. In 4:4 the Aorist subjunctive form φανερώσω αὐτὸ alludes to an answered prayer that will enable clear disclosure of this mystery as an answer to prayer, thus in future time.

<sup>29</sup>For a helpful online survey of the details see Leon L. Morris, "Second Coming of Christ," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/second-coming-of-christ.html>.

<sup>30</sup>In 1:22, the objective of Christ at His return is *to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ.*

In 1:28, Paul's objective in regard to the return of Christ is *so that we may present everyone mature in Christ, ἵνα παραστήσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ.*

eternity.

Thus on the Day of Christ's return it will become universally clear that only those possessing this hidden life in Christ will find validation of the genuineness of this spiritual existence that began with their conversion and extends now into eternity in the full presence of God. This is the point of Paul's statement τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ, [then you also will be revealed with him in glory](#).

The false teachers were advocating that being a Christian now depends upon successfully adhering to the religious ritualism and legalism of their rules and regulations. Only if one managed to achieve satisfactory levels of adherence could he anticipate acceptance with God in final judgment. This Paul repudiates completely as false and spiritual suicide. Instead, Christ has accomplished everything we need by His death and resurrection. When we are immersed into that death/resurrection life of Christ in our conversion, a new life emerges that God will validate as correct on the day Christ comes again.

Thus, Paul lays the foundation for how to live a life pleasing to God. At its center is to keep one's focus exclusively on Christ. In the relationship begun in conversion one can increasingly experience His power and guidance all through life to cope with the temptations of fleshly indulgence and worldliness. Out of this focus comes the path of faithfulness in living. Validation of the truthfulness of this way comes at the return of Christ with the invitation of Christ's people to enter into the full presence of God for eternity.

The following admonitions in 3:5 - 4:6 will build off this spiritual principle laid down here in vv. 1-4. The occasional nature of the letter signals that Paul will deal only with those issues he feels are relevant to his initial readers. No systematic treatment of all the issues of Christian living will be presented in this material. Nor should we expect such a treatment from one of his letters.

## **2. What does the text mean to us today?**

Again, the areas of application to contemporary Christian experience are numerous and very critical to understanding the nature of Christian living. The basis upon we live life day by day religiously is central to whether it is being lived ultimately successfully or in disastrous self-deception. In 3:1-4, Paul sets forth the only genuine foundation for living a Christian life.

And this foundation stands in stark contrast to and in complete repudiation of the false foundation of religious legalism and ritualism being advocated by the false teachers at Colossae. Their approach was human based, while the Gospel is divinely based. Their approach is ego centric with the motivation of self accomplishment as necessary to please God. Thus it grows out of the very fallen nature that it is powerless to overcome.

Spiritual union with Christ in a 'hidden' spiritual existence is the genuine life that opens the door to God's presence and resources to then live appropriately in relationships with others. This union with Christ begins with a death experience in which our very existence is surrendered to God through Christ in a moment of deliberate choice. Coming out of this dying to self is a refocusing of our priorities on Heavenly things rather than earthly things. Christ becomes the very center of our life and the nurturing of that relation stands as the number one priority of our life. That this is the exclusive way of acceptance from God will be validated in Christ's return when only those living this way find full acceptance into the eternal presence of Almighty God. Those following religious legalism and self-accomplishment will discover to their horror the rejection of God, just as Jesus also affirmed in Matt. 7:21-23.

It is then from this foundation that we can assemble a Christian life shaped by the will of God, as Paul will define it to the Colossians in 3:5 through 4:6 of his letter. The admonitions presented are not legalistic rules for self accomplishment. Rather, they are sign points pointing committed believers to the path of God's will and expectation in their day to day living. The spiritual life in Christ deep within us will now concretize itself outwardly within the parameters of these directions.

1) What is the foundation of your Christian life?

2) What does 'dying' to self and with Christ mean?

- 3) Do you focus on 'Heavenly things' in your daily living?
  
- 4) What does Paul mean by 'the things above'?
  
- 5) How does your conversion help you live each day?
  
- 6) What is the point in the return of Christ that Paul emphasizes here?