

Seeking the Life Above
Col. 3:1-17
Rev. Bill Reeves

Sometimes, when we have a goal, that goal might define who we are. We might be able to say, “_____ is my life. You fill in the blank.” At different times in our lives, we might have other things where that activity defines us. Maybe our job. My job is my life. Perhaps a mother has a child, and that child takes up all of her care and becomes her life. I remember coaching tennis, and for the time that I played tennis, I loved the game. And then I started coaching it, and tennis had much to do with who I was. Because I spent a lot of time reading about coaching, how to coach, and how to train people to play the game, and in that process, you could say that tennis was my life. I mean, I loved the game.

Now, I’ve walked away from the game in many ways. I don’t watch it with the same interest. It’s still a fun game for me. I love it. I wish I could do it, but it no longer defines my life. So we have something that takes up our interest for a while.

Context of 3:5-4:6

1:1	1:13	2:4	3:5-4:6	4:7-18
TRUE DOCTRINE		FALSE DOCTRINE	CHRISTIAN LIVING	CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHI
Mainly doctrine			Mainly practical	Mainly personal

Irving Jensen

Well, today we want to look at that principle where we’re seeking things above. Where our treasure is, that’s where our heart is. And there’s the part of the Christian life where we are learning, like it says here in Colossians chapter 3, “Christ is all and in all.” “Christ is our life.” So he fills in the blank. “Christ is our life.”

I’ve been a Christian now for 54 years. And yeah, I could say Christ was my life for most of that time. He’s essential to me. There were even times in those 54 years when my focus on him was real-focused. And then you kind of walk along, he’s your Lord, but then you’re going daily, and then you get another challenge to make Him your Lord. So that’s going on all of those 54 years.

We want to look at today as having a heavenly mindset, where Christ is our life. And, of course, he gives us the words that are eternal. We want to be

able to mortify or to put to death the old man, the flesh, and we're talking about sin and the sinful nature when we talk about this. And we want to put on the new man. We want to be able to renew that new man every day. And finally, we want to get a new wardrobe, or at least we need to understand our new wardrobe as a fruit of the Spirit. We get a new wardrobe based on how it looks, but when people see our life, that's what they see. Those are the clothes. We put away the filthy ones, and we get a new wardrobe. That's part of the fruit of the Spirit. And we get a new song as we look at these three things today.

Set Your Minds on Things Above

First of all, it tells us here, in Colossians chapter 3:1-4.

If you were raised with Christ, seek those things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Upward

**Seeking the things
above - Emphasis**

Not the things on earth
(*Context Sin vs. 5*)

Downward

We are to put an emphasis on things above not the things of the flesh, old man, sin.

So here we have the goal of seeking the things which are above. And as one writer put it, "You must not only seek heaven but also think heaven." And that's a good thought. And then, on the other hand, you've heard it said, "We are so heavenly-minded but no earthly good." There can be people who are so absorbed with their spiritual formation and what they think about it that they're practically not doing what they should be doing, like being a parent or being part of a family.

The Bible gives us a lot of wisdom on how to live this life because God created us to live on earth. And there is a way that God created us on earth that is wise or is best. And it's very practical. We're not to ignore that.

What we're talking about with earth here, the things of the earth, what we're talking about in verse two, we're talking about the sinful things. We're talking about the wrong things. We're talking about what the Bible describes as

filthy rags, the garment that we have, it's filthy rags. That's a phrase out of Isaiah.¹ And we don't want to have that garment on our body. You know, it stinks. It's been made dirty. It looks filthy. It's disgusting. And it looks awful. And as we get into these sins, we'll see their awfulness. We're not to put on those old, soiled clothes.

I recall summer football practices, where we would have a morning practice and then come back to practice again later in the day. Putting on those sweaty clothes for the afternoon practices was very difficult.

We're to seek the things that are above. We're setting our minds on the things above. The mind here concerns cognitive and visceral stuff about the mind and its workings. God created the mind, and he created the mind to communicate with the body. So when we talk about the heart, "believe in your heart," we know that the heart doesn't think, but the mind sends messages to the heart where we feel it. It sends messages to the gut, and we feel those emotions. We feel those attitudes. And a lot of times, it's getting us ready to do something that we have to do. And sometimes it can freeze us up, but you know, what God is doing here is when something is heartfelt, we're ready to act on it. We're prepared to live it out. It's not just now we're thinking about it; we're ready to live it out. That's a heart thing. And it's sound.

So, we're to pray for this practical wisdom: James 1.5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." We'll seek this wisdom as a treasure like somebody would for gold or silver.² Proverbs chapter 2:1-6 tells us we seek that wisdom to live it out. And then we live it. That practical wisdom.

If I could illustrate it in a house, it's a practical thing. I've said this before, but it's good to insulate your home, have windows that help keep the nasty weather out, have a good roof, etc. And it's good to have a house that does its job and gives you shelter. Now, that house isn't going to be forever. I'm not going to take it to Heaven. But it's been good for me while I'm here on earth. It's been good for me. And I've done wise things with it that make my life better. That's kind of what we're talking about here. We want to be wise in our practical lives.

But the living that we're doing when we seek the things above here's what Jesus said about it,

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust

¹ Isa.64:6

² Prov. 2:1-6

destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matt. 6:19-21

We must remember that our life here on earth is temporary. Our life in Heaven is eternal. Focusing on the eternal gives us a good attitude about what’s below. You know, again, going back to that practical wisdom that we need. We need to have a good mechanic. We need to have a good doctor. We need to have a good carpenter. We need skills around us that help us live, help us to survive, and help us to live well. I don’t recommend living outdoors. I don’t recommend becoming a street person who lives under the stars, where the only clothing and warmth you have is whatever you can to cover yourself up. You know, some people live in boxes. I don’t recommend that. You’re not long for this world when you’re living like that. It’s going to be hard. I think it’s a better way to live than that. We must pray for people in those situations and try to help them. But that’s no life to live. Not having anything doesn’t mean that’s the best way to live life. No, we are to take the things that God gives us and live them as well as we can so that we can serve the Lord and we can help our families, we can help our church, we can help our workplace, where we’re doing things that help people live better. You know, work is important. “Yeah, I know all this stuff I’m going to leave behind, but while I’m here on earth, I’ll do what God wants me to do as I walk with him.” And that’s what this is all about.

Now, we’ve been raised with Christ. Compare Ephesians 2:1-6.

1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

It tells us that we were raised with Christ. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but he made us alive. And now we have eternal life. And we’re seated in the heavenly places. It goes along with this passage that we’re studying today. And I think it’s essential for us to understand that our life is this way. In fact, we’ve died to it. Galatians tells us in Galatians 2:20,

“I’ve been crucified with Christ. It’s no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. In the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Our life now is hidden in Christ. We live now by faith. We don’t live by sight. I haven’t seen the angels. I haven’t seen God yet. But I believe one day I’m going to see the angels. One day, I’m going to see God, and I’ll live by sight. But today, I live by faith. And the Bible tells us consistently in the Old Testament and in the New that “the just will live by faith.” There’s only one way to live, and that’s by faith. We’ve died, and our lives are hidden with Christ. But when Christ appears, then we will also appear with him in glory. And that gives us a whole picture of something that will happen in the future.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” You see, only Jesus, Peter said in agreement with the other disciples, “You have the words of eternal life.” “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God shows us how to put our faith and trust in him. And when we do, we are given eternal life. And that life is in Christ. And we are in Christ, and He is in us. That’s a spiritual thing. And that’s going on. That’s what Peter is talking about.

Put Off, Put On

Now, let’s go on to 3:5-11.

“5Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

Our Wardrobe

Lay Aside These Vices	Put On These Virtues
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fornication	dissensions	love	thankfulness
homosexuality	envy	charity	joy
adultery	drunkenness	purity	peace
impure thoughts	anger	holiness	goodness
hatred	bearing-	compassion	self-control
lust	grudges	kindness	faithfulness
pornography	deviousness	humility	godliness
materialism	stealing	gentleness	perseverance
(covet)	lying	patience	faith hope
greed	slander	tolerance	teachability
strife	cursing	forgiveness	courage
jealousy	vanity	mercy	prudence
rage	pride	graciousness	contentment
bitterness	boasting	generosity	
	arrogance		

3

Oh man, there's a lot said here. Let's work through it. You're going to have something to look at here, and it's a chart of things that you are to put off. Vices are the things that are evil and bad. That's the old man. Those are the things of the earth that we are to put off. We're not to put off how to live by faith on the earth. We're to do that by God's will, which is very wise, helpful, and beneficial to us and the ones we love. We are to put off, though, this evil stuff. So when you look at the chart here, think about what's in your life. What are you struggling with? What do you need to put off? It's different for all of us, and sometimes, each one of these things comes at us at a different time in our lives. We might have some things when we were younger. We have some things when we're a little older, and then finally, when you get to be an older man like me, there are other things that you have to deal with. But we're always putting off this filthy rag. And that's what these sins are.

Notice how they're connected. Fornication, uncleanness, passion, and evil desire all deal with sensual sin. And there's a time when this may be a huge problem. And we got to put off those things. We don't want to be controlled by these sins that harm ourselves and others. Whenever you think about sin, think about the harm it causes physically, spiritually, and socially in our relationships. When you look at it, there's always going to be a negative consequence to it. And it's good to think that through. Some sins have moments when we like their

feeling. But if we stay with that sin, it will destroy our life. It's going to destroy our bodies. There's going to be consequences. We may not be paying them right now, but we will be paying them. So when you look at the sins here, of sensual sins, uncleanness, fornication, passion, evil desire, we're talking about things that take a God-given behavior, sexual behavior that belongs in a marriage where the married couple are loving each other and having the personal wonderful experience. And they're turning to behaviors that break that bond and break that relationship and hurt that relationship. And with their desires, they treat other people less than people. They become objects. Yeah, there's venereal sin and unwanted pregnancies. But even more than that, sometimes, it dehumanizes people. All because we're choosing a way to behave that becomes filthy rags. That's what sin does.

Now look at this covetousness, which is idolatry. Greed becomes something that possesses somebody and does all kinds of behaviors that are often very evil because of their greed. It becomes an idol, something that they worship. Greed and covetousness, we all have ambitions that are God-given. But when that ambition turns to hurt others to get it, you can see how sin distorts and destroys and becomes a filthy rag. In every war that's fought, greed is involved. In every war that's fought, some covetousness is engaged. Every type of action that people do that turns bad against others, you know, covetousness is a big thing. We might call it materialism today, but I like covetousness because it relates to all the sins.

Now, because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience, the same language that we have over in Ephesians chapter 2:2, the sons of disobedience. So, you know, a scripture that relates to this, Ephesians 4, 22-24,

that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the Spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

There are things it tells us after we're saved in Ephesians: we're saved by faith and grace, but we were created to walk in works that God has made, and we should walk in them.⁴ And so, this is what we're doing as we renew our mind, the Spirit of our mind, the things above, setting our mind in things above, that's what this is doing. We are putting on a new set of clothes, how we behave, live, and respond. As we walk by faith, we try to make our life agree with God, with what we say and do.

⁴ Eph. 2:8-10

We once lived like them, and now we don't. God's wrath is coming down on the sons of disobedience. He will, at one time, hold people accountable for their actions, and evil people will be accountable for what they've done. And we may have walked in some of those ways—in fact, we did. We may not have been the worst people who ever walked in those ways, but we walked in those ways.

You know, there are a lot of people that consider themselves good people. They're not the worst people that have lived on the planet, but there are still things that are done and are wrong and sinful in their lives, and Christ died for their sins. They may not be the worst sinner, but Christ died for their sins. And so we lived in that world. We lived where Satan was in control of life, where sin ruled, and we were dead. Spiritually, we were dead, but then we were made alive; we have a new walk.

Now, some of these sins, of course, also go together, like anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another. That kind of sin bubbles over into either actions or words that are very nasty, and we're not to be that way. We're to live a different way. We're not to lie to each other. Now, the opposite of lying, of course, is truth. Satan is a liar from the beginning, corresponding to Ephesians again; let's review chapter 4, first verse 25.

“Therefore, putting away lying, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”

We belong together in the church, and we're not to speak lies to one another and even our neighbors. We're to speak the truth. The truth is, back up here in Ephesians 4:15, “But speaking the truth in love that you may grow in all things into him, which is to have Christ.” This truth is of God. It's of the Spirit. Conversely, to Satan, who's the Father of lies, he tells half-truths. It's tough sometimes in our world to deal with half-truths. Satan is the prince of the air, ruling in the world.

We are to put off the old man according to his deeds. Here is the old clothing, the old garment, the filthy rags. We're to put that off, that old smelly stuff. We're to put on the new one, who's renewed in the knowledge according to the image of him who created him. When we were born again, God created in us a new person who's now in the Spirit, who's now walking by faith, who now has eternal life, and that life will continue. The new person has a new garment put on. The new garments are all those virtues that you saw on the list that we're walking in, that we're trying to do by the faith, by the power of the Spirit. That new clothing is not the filthy rags. There is a practical clothing that comes into our life that we're to do.

Now, where there's neither Greek or Jew or circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all. There we have again this whole principle in Colossians, which is the rule of the book. "Christ is all and in all." Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ."

In Christ, we are all "accepted in the beloved."⁵ None of us are elevated above others. All of the roles that we have here on earth are not going to be part of the roles that we have in Heaven. Every believer in Heaven is going to be there, and they're going to have eternal life. There's equality that naturally exists for everybody.

But being equal doesn't mean the same. In this life and even in Heaven, I don't think we will be the same. We're going to have the same eternal life, and we're all going to have something where we are perfect, and we won't have the limitations we have had in this life. But I don't think we're going to be the same. I think everybody's going to be unique. We're equal, but we're not the same. And there are differences. So there are differences in this life. Some of us are males, and some of us are females. Some of us are Greeks, Gentiles, or we're Jews. Those are the only two races recognized in the Bible. We are Gentiles, or we are Jews. But when we trust Christ, both Jew and Gentile are in the same life.

There's a sameness about it. That drove a lot of the people in the New Testament crazy. They had a hard time accepting that Gentiles would be included in the work of Christ. And that was a real problem. Well, that's our equality. But being equal doesn't mean we're the same. Some of us are strong, but lo and behold, there are stronger people than us. Some of us are smart, and others are smarter than others. Some of us can make mistakes with a hammer and a saw, and some are good at fixing things. We're not the same. But there is an equality of acceptance where we, brothers and sisters in Christ, can accept one another. If we're serving others because of our gift and talent, it doesn't make us better. It just makes us responsible to do our job as best we can. So, keep that in mind. Equality is not the same as sameness. We are different. But being different doesn't diminish the quality that we are. I'll let you wrestle with these thoughts and think about them.

New Clothes, New Song

All right, last section.

⁵ Eph. 1:6

12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Sometimes, I don't point out the main ideas of some of these paragraphs, but here we have "Therefore, as the elect and beloved, put on tender mercies." All right, put on tender mercies. And we're putting on a new garment. What does it look like? Tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, putting up with each other, which isn't always easy, and forgiving one another, which is often not easy. But if anybody has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you must also do.

We are putting on a new wardrobe. I can remember this. I mean, this was something. Fifty-four years ago, I was at a youth convention, and out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a very beautiful girl with a red dress. The red dress went from her neck, literally her neck, all the way down to her feet. It was all covered, a long dress. She was a beautiful girl with a stunning red dress and stood out. Then she walked past us, and on the backside, a lot of the backside was showing. I can tell you that everybody in that particular meeting was a guy because it's what we do. I noticed that dress as it walked by us, and we saw this girl, her backside; it was just about showing. Well, everybody had their eye on her until she sat down again. So whatever that preacher was talking about, all the guys didn't hear it because that wardrobe was stunning, and everybody noticed it.

Well, you know, J. Vernon McGee, who gives this quote, "What the well-dressed Christian will wear this year." He was one of the speakers at this conference at that time. What will the well-dressed Christian wear? They wear this: loving, tender mercies, kindness, meekness, humbleness, longsuffering. That's what they wear.

What is humility? Well, it means having a realistic view of oneself. Think lowly of ourselves because we are so. We don't think more highly than ourselves. We seek to help other people. Humility comes down to love in action. When we are showing love in action, we are showing humility. That's the best

way I can understand it. It's so hard to be humble, and it is. But when we show love in action, we're being humble.

Now, this "Tender Mercy, "bowels of Compassion," 1611," out of the old 15th and 16th-century translations, the King James is the only one that reads it this way, "bowels of Compassion." The other translations use "Tender Mercies," as do our modern translations. We feel this in our body as we're doing it. We feel for somebody. We feel for the actions that we're doing. Tender mercies are the new garment. But all these things put on love, the bond of perfection. And love again is head of the list. It's the head of the fruit of the Spirit. When you're doing the fruit of the Spirit, you do love. That's the bond of perfection. And even though we're always trying to grow in maturity, it's always a process. We never achieve perfection, but we're always pushing towards it. Love is that bond that puts it together for us. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body, and be thankful.

So the peace of God in calamity, in chaos, in crisis, that peace of God, God gives, even amid trial or tribulation. There's an inner quietness that God can provide, even when everything else is out of control. There's an inner quietness that God can give that happens in the middle of the battle. A calm, sensitive tranquility, a feeling of harmony, this experience of ease and rest. We shouldn't be feeling that because of the chaos around us, but here we are. Remember that our bodies can suffer when it takes over all of our energy. It can happen. I don't want to go there, but it happens in life. So we have to be compassionate when people suffer, where that suffering is so great that it takes over everything they are. They will get peace, even though the chaos may be overwhelming at that time. But I've known many times when, despite what was going around, I had the peace of God in it. So I don't see how you work all that out. I just know that we're capable of suffering a lot. So, let's be gracious.

Now let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching, and admonishing one another with Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and singing grace in your hearts to the Lord. There's a new song. Not only do we get new clothes that look lovely because of love, you know, that's what people say. We get a new song. And in that song, we're dealing with what the scriptures sing about in the Psalms. We're getting what we sing to God about, and we sing about what the Lord is doing and the Lord, who he is hymns. And then we have the spiritual songs about how the Lord works in our lives. And you know, these songs that we're singing, we should have a lot of songs that have a lot of content about both our experience and the truth. Now it's fun to have little repetitive songs once in a while. You know, they're fun, but we also need well-

written and well-thought-out songs. And those songs encourage our faith. They're part of the new songs that are given to us.

Now, here's the principle that can be applied through our experience. What does the life of Christ look like? Well, it looks like this. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." 3:17 is a great verse to memorize everything we do, what we say and do, and what we should try to do in agreement with God in the name of the Lord. You know, when you pray in the name of Jesus, you're praying that your prayer agrees with the will of God. Something that Jesus agrees with, not that we always know. We pray when we pray because we have needs, but we know that we want to agree with the Lord in our prayers.

And that's a work in progress. We're never perfect. We aren't. "Oh, you're a hypocrite." No, the human race is a hypocrite. And in the sense that we have the same struggles, we're not perfect, but we want our life to agree with the Lord. That's the goal that we set for us.

Notice what it says down here in verse 23. "And whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men." That's what we're doing, words and deeds in agreement with him. Life here is not always easy, and when we look at the Christian life, sometimes.

To live above with the saints we love, that will be glory.

But living below with the saints I know that is a different story.

Sometimes, it's a work in progress. But the principle of setting our mind on Christ, the principle of putting to death the old filthy garments of sin, and then putting on a new garment and letting God renew us day by day by his Spirit, by his word, by the encouragement that we give one another, where we are renewed and we put on this new wardrobe, this latest wardrobe which involves the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit. This new wardrobe is terrific to see.

When people see, Jesus said, "If you love one another, other men will know that you are my disciples." When they see that in action, in thought, when people see that indeed, then, you know, they're going to see something beautiful, that new clothes, and then we're going to be able to sing about it. We got a new song, you know, a completely different song than what we had before, a song that gives us hope even in times of trial or trouble. We have a new song. So, I hope these things help you understand this passage about how to live for God and how he helps us through it. Amen. Amen.