

**BETHEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**  
**FAIR LAWN, NJ**  
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**Sunday, March 20, 2011**

**“Union With Christ”**  
**Colossians 3:1-4**

One of the most poignant scenes in The Pilgrim’s Progress is when Evangelist comes alongside Christian and Faithful in order to prepare them for the trials ahead. Among other things, he urges them to continue giving first place to God’s Kingdom: “Let the Kingdom be always uppermost in your minds, and believe unflinchingly in the things that are unseen. Let nothing that is on this side get within and attach itself to your hearts. Above all, be very careful of your own hearts and the lusts that can hide there. ‘The heart is the most deceitful thing there is, and desperately wicked. (Jeremiah 17:9)”

When we turn to Paul’s warnings against the false teachers at Colossae, we soon discover that this is his emphasis as well. As we saw last week, he has concluded the previous passage with a strong indictment of any and all legalistic regulations as the means of restraining the indulgences of the flesh. They can only provide an appearance of godliness and wisdom. What, then, will actually work? Is there an alternative?

The answer is a resounding “yes,” as Paul now goes on to explain. By seeking “the things above” – where Christ is – we can overcome the seductions of the flesh and the distractions of this world. Why, then, would we want our lives and thoughts and actions fixed anywhere else? That is the point of this passage.

This passage is also the positive counterpart to the preceding one. Note how the opening phrase in 3:1 (“If then you have been raised with Christ . . .”) parallels what Paul has just written in 2:20 (“If with Christ you have died . . .”). His argument is far-reaching: if we have been united to Christ in His death, then we have been set free *from* the bondage of the world and its precepts/practices (2:20-23). If we have been united with Christ in His resurrection; then we have been set free *for* a new life in Him (3:1-4). Therefore, as one of my former professors was fond of saying, “We can no longer live the lives that we once lived, because we are no longer the people we once were.”

Within these verses, this spiritual union with Christ is affirmed in a three-fold progression of thought: we have been raised with Christ in the past (3:1-2); we are hidden with Christ in the present (3:3); we will be revealed with Christ in the future (3:4).

### **I. We Have Been Raised With Christ In The Past (3:1-2)**

If we have been resurrected with Christ to a new way of life, then the focus of our pursuits, interests, goals and aims must be in harmony with His. This is the underlying reason for setting our minds and hearts on “the things that are above.” But what’s the attraction? Please note well that it’s not the heavenly *stuff* (the mansions in the sky, the streets of gold, etc). For Paul, the appeal of heavenly things is the presence of the Lord Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of God. It is the glory and beauty and power and splendor of the risen Christ to which Paul directs our attention.

This conscious and deliberate fixation of our minds upon Christ is Paul's way of emphasizing our continued devotion to the supremacy and Lordship of Christ in our lives. The Christian who is focused on Christ above and therefore submissive to His eternal values is the Christian who will not be so easily seduced by worldly entanglements and sinful pleasures. As I have said on numerous occasions, the Christian life may at times be difficult, but it is not complicated!

## **II. We Are Hidden With Christ In The Present (3:3)**

The fundamental reason for seeking the things that are above is that we have died (past tense) and our lives are now hidden with Christ (the perfect tense, stressing the ongoing and continual results of our union with Christ). The contrast is noteworthy: our death with Christ is an accomplished fact; our life with Christ is a continuing fact. Furthermore, in this union with Christ, we are forever secure and safe. Our life is "with Christ," and together with Christ we are "in God." This clearly emphasizes a double protection, which Jesus Himself taught when He said of His sheep, ". . .no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." (John 10:28-29)

## **III. We Will Be Revealed With Christ In The Future (3:4)**

So extensive is this union that Paul can say that Christ is our life. Apart from Him, we have no life. Like a folded letter sealed in an envelope, our identity is so "enveloped" in who Christ is and what He has done that it makes no sense to speak of us independently from Him. And one day we will share in the glorified life of Christ, for we will appear with Him "in glory."

With these words, Paul points us to the final return of Christ, when He will ultimately be glorified in the very world in which He was humiliated. How, or when, we don't know. But we do know that His glory will be seen, and at that very moment we will share in His glory, since we can never be separated from Him. All of this takes place "in the twinkling of an eye" when our mortal bodies are raised from the dead and are transformed into a glorious body like Christ's. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson explains the significance of this for all who are united to Christ:

Because Christ having died once will never die again; because he lives in the power of an indestructible life, and *because we are united to him* – the power which once raised him from the dead will flow from him to raise up our mortal bodies (see Rom. 6:8-10; Heb. 7:16; Rom. 8:11). Paul puts the matter graphically at a period of his life when death seemed to loom large on the horizon (cf. Phil. 1:20-26; 2:17):

Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Philippians 3:20-1. (Know Your Christian Life, p.173)

When viewed from this vantage point, the good news of the Gospel is that the salvation it brings is physical as well as spiritual. The day will come when we will be released from our present frailties and sufferings and given another body in which to live forever, for His glory and honor! *Soli Deo Gloria!*