

“Heaven On Earth?”

Text: Colossians 3:1-4

Series: Book of Colossians [#7]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

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Theme: **Christ’s Work For You Should Change Your Perspective.**

Introduction

“Heaven on earth.” This nice-sounding phrase is used to picture a perfect, out of this world time, place, feeling, society, product, experience, relationship that is, well... *heaven on earth*. An ad for one internet technology firm leads off with the headline “Heaven on Earth.” The ad talks about the company’s network structures which allow Germany’s catholic and protestant churches to manage payroll, accounting, regulatory reporting, and property management, as well as making sermons and a whole range of information available to congregations. It’s *Heaven on earth!*

“Heaven on Earth?” Really? We realize this expression is hyperbole, an exaggeration to paint a picture, to make a point. We know that the things described, as wonderful as they may be, are not really heaven on earth. *But*, there is a very real way in which believers in Jesus Christ can be experiencing *Heaven on Earth* here and now.

Paul has been hammering home the truth that every believer is complete in Christ. We do not need man made add-ons to be complete. We do not need to receive or accept the judgment of others on us in areas of freedom.

Now he moves to the positive side of being in Christ. We find the core principles here in 3:1-4. Then Paul will make some practical applications. The radical change that Christ brought about in who we are should be reflected in a radical change in our perspectives, priorities and actions. That change is nothing less than *heaven on earth*— heavenly perspectives, priorities and actions. *Christ’s work for you should change your perspective.*

The Work Christ Has Accomplished For You.

Paul gives us five pictures phrases that help describe the work Christ has accomplished for us. First, you have died with Christ. Verse 3, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” *You have died with Christ.*

We know Christ died for us. Romans 5:8, “... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He, the perfect, eternal, sinless One, God the Son, was made “to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Yes, Christ died for us!

But what does it mean that *we* have died *with Christ*? Romans 6 tells us we have died to sin’s control and penalty, and so are to consider ourselves dead to its control (2, 11). So verse 14, “sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” Galatians 2 tells us we have died to the Law, to its power and penalty (19).

When we placed our faith in Christ, we died *with Him* to the penalty and control of sin. Yes, sin is present and powerful around and within, but because we died with Christ we are no longer spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins; because we died with Christ we are no longer helpless slaves of sin.

Secondly, you have been raised up with Christ. The chapter opens with, “Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ...” The “if” assumes a positive answer, (i.e., “If you have been, and you have been”). So Paul’s statement has the force of “Therefore, *since* you have been raised up with Christ.”

So, we have died with Christ and have been raised up with Christ. We have died to the penalty and mastery of sin so that, as Paul wrote in Romans 6:4, “... as Christ has been raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” As it has been said so often, we have been *saved from* and *saved to*—from sin to new, real spiritual life.

That leads us to the next picture phrase, very similar to this one, yet worth noting on its own. You are alive with Christ. Drop down to verse 4, where Paul tells us that Christ “is our life.” Being alive spiritually is tied up in Jesus. As John wrote, “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:12).

But Christ being “our life” fills out the meaning. As Paul wrote to the Galatian churches,

“I have been crucified with Christ; and *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”
(2:20)

Paul was obviously living as a real, distinct person when he wrote those words. He still had his own mind and personality. What He said is that Christ is the source and substance of his spiritual life. Just as sin and the Law were the power in our old way of life, now Christ is the power in our lives. We continue to live, but Christ in us through the Holy Spirit opens the way to God, fellowship with Him, service for Him, seeing our character transformed to be like Him.

The next picture phrase is that Christ’s work for us includes making us secure in Himself. Go back to verse 3. “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” What does our “life is hidden with Christ in God” mean? The force of the statement is that we have been, are and will be hidden with Christ in God.

The word *hidden* means to be veiled or hidden from view or understanding, as we saw back in 1:26. So, some suggest that here it means that nonbelievers cannot see the reality of who and what believers are. It certainly is true that nonbelievers cannot accurately understand spiritual truth and reality.

1 Corinthians 2:14, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

And 1 John 3:1 tells us the world does not know us because it did not know Christ.

But the word also means “to hide in a safe place,” and so to keep safe and secure. The Greek version of the Old Testament uses the word in this way in Psalm 27:5,

“For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock.”

The word is used the same way again, Psalm 31:20,

“You hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the conspiracies of man; You keep them secretly in a shelter from the strife of tongues.”

This is the point here. Believers have been, are and will be kept safe and secure with Christ in God. What a wonderful, reassuring truth! As Peter wrote, we “...are protected by the power of God” (1 Peter 1:5). No thief will or can snatch us out of the Father’s hand (John 10:28,29). And,

“...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

Yes, Christ’s work for us makes us secure in Himself.

The final picture phrase is that as a believer you will be glorified with Christ. Verse 4. “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” This is the future, *your future*, a *wonderful future*—to be revealed with Christ in glory!

It is a great truth, but it can be difficult to grasp. One mother and her young daughter were reading a Bible story together. When it was the girl’s turn to read, she made her way slowly. “And Jesus said ... one day ... you will ... be with me ... in heaven.” She stopped for a moment, and then said, “Is that all we get? Only *one day*? What a ripoff!” Her Mom helped her sharpen her focus.

Let’s try to sharpen our focus here. 1 John 3:2 tells us,

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when [Christ] appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

In Philippians 3 Paul wrote that Christ

“will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (21).

Then in Romans 8, beginning at verse 29 we read,

“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also *glorified*” (29-30).

We are already glorified in Christ in our position with Him, but it will be revealed and fulfilled when He returns. God will share His splendor and radiance as He then fulfills in us all that it means to be created in His image.

This is some of Christ’s wonderful, beyond amazing work for you.

- You have died to sin and the Law with Him.
- You have been raised up with Him.
- You are alive with Him.
- You are secure in Him.
- You will be glorified with Him.

God has transformed us, recreated us in Christ. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” And this work of Christ for you should change your perspective. Paul tells us about...

The New Perspective You Can And Should Have.

At verse 10 later in this chapter Paul writes that believers “have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” In Ephesians 4 he wrote, “put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (24).

Our new spiritual life, our new nature should be evidenced in our perspective, in how we see everything, in our priorities and in what we say and do. Christ, our life, is in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our eternal destiny is in heaven. And so, the values, perspective, character and priorities of heaven not only can be, but should be ours *now*.

Unfortunately, we can settle into a humdrum earthly perspective and lose sight of heaven’s perspective. We may not even recognize what heaven’s perspective is when we see it. A lady who worshiped in a small, informal and fairly *lively* church visited her

daughter who was part of a large, formal, very solemn church. When a point in the pastor's sermon struck home to her, she shouted out, "Amen, brother!" One of the very formal and proper ushers quickly and quietly walked up to her and whispered, "Madam, are you ill?" "Ill?, young fellow," she answered loud enough for all to hear, "Ill? I'm not ill, I've got religion!" To which the usher, totally at a loss replied, "Good Lord, Madam, not *here! Not here!*"

Christ's work for you should change your perspective in such a way that heavenly things will have top priority in your thinking. Verse 2 says, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." The point is that our deepest, true inner goals and priorities are to be those of heaven, not those of earth. It is easy to say this. It can be difficult to keep them in focus and, so we may continue to be shaped by this world much more than we realize.

Let's think for a moment about "the things above." What are they? From the negative side, they are not the things on earth. Not the temporary, physical and material things. Not the things which Jesus said "the Gentiles [or, those who are not God's children] eagerly seek (Matthew 6:32). Money, possessions, fame and power headline the list.

From the positive side, they are the qualities of heaven — Christ-like character. The motives of heaven — love, humility, sacrifice. The works of heaven — worship and service to God. We find many specific examples in the Bible. Consider just two to start. First, thinking like Jesus. Paul describes Jesus' humility in Philippians chapter 2.

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (verses 5-8)

The second, also in Philippians, is in chapter 4, beginning at verse 8.

"...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."
(8-9)

Question: Are your deepest, true inner goals and priorities those of heaven, or those of earth? The question is not "Do you know they should be?" Nor is it, "Do you want them to be?" Rather, are my, are your, are our deepest, true inner goals and priorities today those of heaven or those of earth? Are we "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" by focusing on heaven's values, goals and priorities? (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 10:5) If not, why not? If not, in light of all that Christ has done for us, what are we going to do starting

right now to give heavenly things top priority in our thinking?

Secondly, Christ's work for us should move us to give top priority to heavenly things in our living. Verse 1.

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

Jesus put it this way, “... seek first [God's] kingdom and righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). In other words, “Think heaven, and live heaven.” Translate the heavenly goals and priorities into action in every situation every day.

What does that mean in practical terms? Again, there are many examples in the Bible. Look ahead to verse 12 here in chapter 3.

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” (verses 12-17)

This is just the start. He goes on to show what seeking things above looks like in areas such as family life, work relationships, prayer, and relationships to nonbelievers.

At this point someone may bring up the warning of D. L. Moody that we are “to not be so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good.” While this kind of withdrawal from the day to day world to an isolated life of contemplating God is possible today, examples are very far and few between in the Western church. More importantly, Paul rules that out as an option for faithful believers with all the practical injunctions he gives, such as 3:12 - 4:6 in this letter, and also in his other letters. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 he wrote, “...if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat either.” There is no room for an isolated and dependent life there.

Do a reality check: Are you really, continually seeking the things above, or those of earth? Am I really seeking the kingdom of God, or is the quest for acceptance, education, the next rung up on my career path, getting the things I really want (*and deserve*), financial security or anything else of this earth what I am really seeking?

The question is not “Do you know you should be seeking the things above?” Nor is the question “Do you want to be seeking the things above?” Rather, am I, are you, are we today truly seeking the things of heaven? If not, why not? If not, in light of all that Christ has done for us, what are we going to do starting right now to give heavenly things top priority in our what we do, in our living?

No, it doesn't mean that you have to be a missionary or pastor, that you have to be in church every time the doors open, that you have to give up your plans for education and vocation, nor that you have to give up your social life. But where you are now, and wherever you find yourself, in each place and circumstance, *think* and *live* focused on, seeking the things above.

This involves changes, most of which God will show you *as* you follow Him. And He will be faithful. In this journey you will no longer be conformed to this world but, as you allow God to renew you by transforming your mind and then your life, you will experience, you will “prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

Conclusion.

Christ's work for you should change your perspective! This is God's Word to us, for us. Do we feel the impact of God speaking to us? Are we, will we, as James says, “prove [ourselves] doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (1:19).

One teenage girl was complaining to her Mom at how tough the exams were. Her mother gave her one of the standard lectures, which boiled down to, “You should try studying this time!” Surprise! The girl tried it. She came home after the big exam and told her mother, “Mom, I don't know why I bothered to study. That was the easiest exam I've ever taken!” The point her mother made was quickly forgotten.

Whatever our age or stage of life, it is easy for us to be like that. In these next few quiet moments, as you think about what Christ has done for believers, make sure you have placed your faith in Him as your Savior and God so that you can know that...

- you have died with Him to the penalty and control of sin;
- that you have been raised up with Him;
- that you are alive with Him;
- that you are secure in Him;
- that you will be glorified with Him.

I will gladly talk with you if you have questions or would like to discuss this.

For all who know Christ, who know you have been forgiven and transformed forever by Him, thank Him for what Christ has accomplished for you, that you are a new person in Jesus Christ. Thank Him that you can have a totally new, different perspective on life, a

heavenly perspective, that brings glory to God, and also peace and satisfaction to yourself. Ask Him to help you think and live each day with the things of heaven as your number one value and priority.

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