

Today we'll be in Colossians 3. Now this is a transitional text, a bridge text in the book of Colossians. Which means its four verses that is tying together the front of the book with the back of the book. And this is very Pauline. This is very much how he writes. By that I mean any time you read one of the books Paul wrote, he is going to pound on the gospel or the nature and character of God and then he is going to move into application. And so he is moving now, from all we've done for 10 weeks is Christology. We have just looked at the person and work of Jesus Christ all the way through last week talking about our identity in Jesus Christ, and now he is going to begin the transition. And it is unbelievably important that you get the transition. I'll show you that transition in 3:1. "If you have been raised with Christ. . ." I just want to stop there. Is he talking to everyone now? No. So the first part of the book is "This is who Jesus is. This is nature and character of Christ. This is Christ as deity. This is Christ as Reconciler. This is Christ as..." It is a lesson on who Christ is. And now he moves and says, "If you have been raised. . ." He's saying, "Those of you who have been converted, those of you who believe this, those of you who understand this, those of you who have been made alive in Christ. If you have been raised with Christ." Now, here is why it's so imperative that you get this. If you miss that he is talking to those who are justified, you are going to believe that what he teaches for the rest of the book is what justifies you. And you would be wrong. So, please hear me say this, this is great bit of tension and causes a great deal of damage in the life of those who are evangelical when they begin to believe that in their moral action they somehow make themselves right before God. In cleaning up their lives, they think they somehow earn and curry favor with God. Paul is going warn us here in a second about that very thing. But he is saying, "If you have been raised with Christ. . ." As in love for Christ brings about transformed lives. Transformed lives do not necessarily bring about love for Christ. It is God alone who justifies, who makes us right before himself in Christ. That's it. You have nothing to offer Him that in the end will make right what you have wronged.

So the big question before we can go anywhere is, have you been raised with Christ? So let me ask just a couple of questions. And if you answer "no" to some of them, you are not a believer. It's just as simple as that. Do you believe that you are a sinner, that you are an idolater, that you have openly rebelled against God? Do you believe that? If you don't believe that, then you are not a Christian. So I will save you the e-mail, because this is what I will e-mail you back. 1 John says that if you say there is no sin in you then you are a liar and the truth is not in you. It's going to say it three different ways. If you say you are not a sinner, if you say that there is no trespass in you, you are a liar, you are self-deceived and the truth is not in you. So do you understand and know that you have offended and rebelled against the God of the universe? Number two, do you believe that Jesus is God in the flesh sent as the wrath absorbing sacrifice for your sins? Do you believe that double imputation occurs, that you get His righteousness and He takes on your sin. Do you believe that Christ was crucified for your sin, for your rebellion and raised again on the third day? If your answer to that is "no," then you are not a believer. You aren't buying into orthodox Christianity. You have created something that is not historical or biblical Christianity. It is something of your own creation.

And then here is another question I would ask although I don't know that I would be as stringent on this one as I would be on the first two, because I think the process of sanctification muddies this water a little bit more than it muddies those two. Those two are real cut and dry. Here is what I would ask. Do you have genuine affection for God? Let me unpack that, because I think that for us affection simply means some sort of emotive state. So if I say affection, my fear is for those of you with church background you are back to Thursday night youth camp singing the same song for seventy-two minutes until everybody rededicates their life. You are thinking that kind of goose bump experience where

you just could almost sense and feel the presence of God. That's a really beautiful mountaintop experience, I am so grateful for those moments God gives us. It has been a very rare man that I have met that walks in that constantly. For the record, no one in the Bible walks that way, which always makes me a little bit nervous about guys like that here who claim to. And here I am going, "Hmm, none of the apostles get to walk in that and nobody in the Old Testament gets to walk in that and everybody else has these dark nights of the soul and these doubts and these wrestling and these times of going, 'where are you God?' You are the first guy we see in all of Scripture and in most of Christian history, you did it! Come and teach us your ways!" We all have the dark night of the soul, and we all have the difficulty. Here is what I mean about affection. Are you serious about following God? Is there in you a genuine desire to submit and to humbly walk with the God of the universe? Where none of that exists, I would say you have tons of room to worry about whether or not you are really converted. Now, that's going to show up in different ways for all of us. We are in all different places on the dirt path that is sanctification. But all of us should be growing in godliness. All of us should be pursuing God. For the regenerated heart there should be a seriousness about the things of God, a genuine pursuit of God, and a submission to the will of God in our lives regardless of how difficult that will be. That's question two. And the next two times after this one that I teach I'll come back to this idea of being justified before you move into sanctified, and sanctification, no matter how far you get down the road, is never going to equate justification. You need justification even to get on the path of sanctification. I know those are big church words, and I apologize for that, but it'd be great if you could pick up those two because they are everywhere.

Okay here we go, 3:1. We will start it over. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." Now I want to stop there, because now we've been justified by God and we are to, now that we have been justified by God, we are to set our sights on things that are above. And he doesn't leave it as this kind of ethereal kind of guesswork on what our eyes should be set on. He's clear, turn your face, turn your eyes up above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. So the goal, the pursuit, what we are after is Christ and to know Him, to walk with Him, to have Him shape us, to have Him chisel away at us, to have Him reveal in us, to have Him create in us a joy of salvation given to us by Him despite us. That's why Paul has taken all this time to unpack for us who Jesus is. Let's go back and just look at some of it. I'm not going to make any comment as much as I'm just going to read it.

Colossians 1, starting in verse 15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him" Just as clearly as I could say it, you should never grow bored of Jesus Christ. There's always more. There's always more to see. It's why in Ephesians Paul says that "In the coming ages" God's going to reveal to you the riches of His grace and His mercy. It's going to take ages, eons, a good bit of eternity for you to get into the depths and beauty that is Jesus Christ. Here that's hard for us to grasp because we tend to get bored quickly. So we've got a favorite song and that's our favorite song for like a week and then we get a new favorite song. And we've got a favorite movie that we really love and then all of a sudden we've got a new movie that we really love. Just fill in the blank. We've got these things that we value and we make much of and then very quickly they are replaced with other things. Well, Paul is making the point here of that's not going to happen with Jesus. There will always be more to see. There will always be more to dig into. There will always be another angle for you to see and hear and understand and grasp and get. There will always be another truth that stirs up your heart toward worship. So Paul is saying here, "Set your mind on Him."

Let me tell you just practical, where your shoes meet the road, why you have to get this and you have to understand this. If you're using Jesus to get something else, when you end up not getting that something else, you become very angry at Jesus or very angry at God who never promised to give you that thing to begin with. So you feel betrayed at a promise you made yourself but God never made you. So, if you're going "Yeah, I'm going to love Jesus because Jesus is going to restore my marriage. . . Yes, I'm going to love Jesus because Jesus is going to handle my crazy kid. . . Yes, I'm going to love Jesus because Jesus is going to get me through this job situation. . . Yes, I'm going to chase Jesus because if I follow Jesus this is what He's going to get me, this is what He's going to bring me. . ." in the end, you are an idolater and none of those things have been guaranteed you. So when you don't get that and you don't get that the goal is Jesus and the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that we are reconciled to God not that everything works out perfect, you have set yourself up to feel like you have been betrayed by God. But you haven't been. He has given you all that you need and all that He's promised you, which is Himself. And that's the good news of the gospel.

Do you remember the bridge illustration, where somebody would draw a cliff over here and a cliff over here and God on one side and you on the other? And they would ask, "How you would get across? You can't get across." And then they would draw a cross between this cliff and this cliff and say something like, "Jesus is the bridge that gets you across." So the good news is that Jesus gets you across the big chasm of sin and rebellion and reunites, reconciles you to God the Father. That's the gospel message. Now, can God reconcile your marriage? Absolutely. Can God get you through that job situation? Absolutely. Can God intervene in the life of your children? Absolutely. Should we be confident that He will? Absolutely. Should we pray and ask Him to do those things? Absolutely. Should we get furious with Him if he doesn't? No, we're finite small and have tiny brains. He has always been and always will be. He sees all, knows all and understands how everything is intricately woven together to accomplish his purposes and our joy. So in a moment where it doesn't work out like we would have it work out, we default to His wisdom not grow angry in our stupidity.

Now, he doesn't even leave us hanging with that. He then gets into how we go about that, at least a major component in that. "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above not on things that are on earth." And so, since we have been justified by God alone, let us look to what is above, Christ at the right hand of God. And how do we do that? By setting our mind on Him and not on earthly things. Okay, so how do you do that? A couple of ways. I'll give you the centrals, and then I'll give you the two questions I have given you for seven years. For everyone, it's going to involve Scripture. How do you set your mind on things that are above? You can guess about God, you can create your own God or you can humble yourself before how God's revealed Himself to us which is in the Scriptures. So, it involves the Scriptures. It involves prayer. I'll say more and more of this, that everyone is wired different. So it's going to look different for all of us, but these should be components in all of us; Scripture, prayer and rest (or Sabbath). There have to be days where you stop trying to earn something. There have to be days where you just are, where you don't do, where you just be. There have to be those days where you press pause. I think I told you in "The Path" Series, that if you don't answer e-mail, it's not like puppies and kittens begin to combust all over the world. Everything is going to be okay. You can breathe. It'll be fine. You need the Sabbath. You need to have those days where you just stop and breathe, where you just kind of back up for a second and look at life and measure it. I think it involves meditation. It involves thinking on a dwelling on Scripture. And I'll tell you why this is so key. You don't read the Bible like the newspaper. It's not a race to read the end of the Bible. You chew on it. You think on it. You apply it. It's not just reading it. Just reading it is not going to hold some magical silver bullet power. You read it slowly, you digest it and you apply it. You let life rub on it. You submit to God in it. So there's meditation involved. There is community involved. You set your mind on things above by walking with others who are interested in setting their minds on things above. So that conversation frequently comes back to who He is, how He is and what He is accomplishing in your life. So those are kind of just simple, historic, spiritual disciplines of the church of Jesus Christ. Those have always been there, they will always be there and it just works itself out.

So, when I was in college I heard a guy teach out of the Bible and he quoted somewhere out of Proverbs, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. (KJV)" And his whole point was if you wanted to commune with God, you had to get up really early in the morning and you had to get in that quiet place. And I'm like, "Early in the morning? I'm already in a quiet place. I'm in my bed, sleeping." So, I tried it and it just didn't work very well. What I learned is really late at night, that's a good rhythm for me. At night I could study, I could pray, I could read my Bible and I could think. Late at night really worked for me. And then after I got married, I learned that there are morning people and there are night people. I married a woman who is neither. She doesn't really want to stay up very late, and she doesn't want to get up very early. It's just neither. I learned very early that I am going to go to bed with my wife. And so I stopped being the night owl. And I was just preaching back then, and I wasn't doing anything else. So I would read and study and pray in the afternoons, and it worked really well for me. And God's done what He's done here. And although I do get to do quite a bit of studying every week, I have found that early in the morning is really a good time, especially now that we have kids. Now, I've just got to beat them up. I've got to get them up. My two oldest have like this antenna that says, "There's something going on in the house that I've got to disrupt." And so it's kind of a race to see who can get up earliest right now. So we are close to just beating them and putting them back to bed. I don't know if that's legal, so we'll see. But, for me, now it's morning time. And so I don't know that is the time that it works, I just know that these are things that should be in your life if you're setting your mind on things that are above. There are questions that I've asked you for eight years now are to consciously be aware of. What stirs your affections for Jesus Christ? What is it, when you are around it, when you're in it, when you're with them, that really stirs up your heart and mind so that you want to know the Lord you want to worship and follow Him? What are those things that stir your affections? It could be on this central list, or it could be well beyond this central list. I think this central list is going to be in everyone's life to one extent or another. But are there things outside of that stirs your affections for Jesus Christ? Is there a type of music that stirs up your affections for Jesus Christ? When you go see epic film, does that stir up your heart and mind toward Jesus Christ? I don't know. What is it that stirs your affection?

The one I've always used with you is my college roommate, Rich Caudle, married my sister, and we're still friends. That did not divide us. And when we got bored of playing in Abilene, and that just means when Wal-mart busted us playing hide and seek, we would come to Dallas and we would spend the night at Rich's house, which is in Highland Village. On Sunday morning we would come to Highland Village First Baptist Church, this church. So, that's kind of the irony of how life is kind of twisted. So when I was in college, I came to what is now the Village Church. So his father passed away and we went to his funeral. He had done some pretty heroic stuff in the Vietnam War and so it was full military funeral and they folded the flag and popped off the 21 guns, and it was really a beautiful service. And then afterward, we were kind of walking around the graveyard and I came across a tombstone of a guy who died when he was around my age. And so I was 24 at the time. So the guy on the tombstone was 24, and I began to try to imagine his life. Did he get a chance to get married? What did he die of? There was nothing but this is when he was born this is when he died, and then there was this little race car thing on his tombstone? I began to wonder about his life, and in all that wondering, I was reminded that I am mortal and that I'm going to die and that I'm not guaranteed any amount of years to come. Being in that graveyard that day stirred up my affections for Jesus Christ. Because my confidence needed to be in Him and my life needs to be in Him and my focus on the things that are above and the mindset in my brain focused intently on Jesus Christ as I looked at the tombstone with the guy's name on it who died when he was my age. And so we have made it a habit of doing that over the years of doing that. In fact, I have even taken the staff before. The last time we went, we all got chiggers. We haven't been back since. I thought they were like Oompa Loompas. I didn't even know that existed. My mom would always tell me, "Don't let the chiggers get you." And I was like "okay," and they never did. So I thought they were imaginary. They're not. They are really horrible, horrible creatures. And so we went out and we looked at it, and it's just this reminder. And here's why I say all that. The graveyard is something that stirs my affections for Jesus Christ. But I'm not telling anybody in here to go to the graveyard. Although I do recommend it, and I do think it's Biblical. Ecclesiastes says "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all

mankind, and the living will lay it to heart." It's a smarter man who understands that he's going to die and maybe sooner than he thinks. It's the smarter man or woman who understands that and begins to take seriously the things of God. And so early mornings are now one of those things. Those were never things for me early on in life for me. That's a new thing on the list.

And then I think there are things that rob you of affections. I think that's the other part you have to look at. And that's why he also says here, not only do you set your mind on things that are above, but don't set them on things of this earth, on temporary things. If I had to bet, what hinders the bulk of you in your relationship with Christ is not something that's morally wicked but something that's morally neutral. I couldn't take you to Bible and say, "See, look that's evil." So I don't think television is evil, I don't think movies are evil and I don't think hobbies and leisure are evil. Just for the record, I think you are. And because you are evil, you do those things and elevate those things beyond where those things should be and then don't pursue God with the same diligence by which you pursue whatever this thing is. And so it's funny just watching twitter and watching like the world is geeked out of their minds about the Lost finale tonight. Even believers, couldn't sleep last night. They were up early, nauseous, just out of control. For those of you for who it's not Lost, it's Jack Bauer. I mean we all know he's going to die tomorrow night. How else is 24 going to end? If it's not that it's something else. You just replace it with something else. And there are these things that all of a sudden they are not intrinsically wicked, but because you are intrinsically wicked you elevate them beyond what they should be and now you can't pursue the Lord, you don't have any concentration on the Lord. But if you got into another area of life, you've got all sorts of concentration, you've got all sorts of memory, all sorts of intellect. So it could be morally neutral things just absolutely sabotaging your depth of intimacy with Christ. So, what stirs your affections and what robs your affections? I think you've constantly got to be aware of this. You've got to constantly got to be tuned in and dialed in to this. Because Romans 6 is going to say that there is a mind set on the flesh that ends up in death and there's a mind set on the Spirit that leads to life and peace. And we are going to find out in the rest of Colossians 3 that there is this illustration that there are certain things that we are to put on and certain things to take off.

Now, look at the next line, because I'll do a little confessing here and ask that you not make me feel all alone. At least once a week, maybe more, I'll wake up to the reality that I have not done a good job of that. So the Scriptures command me to set my mind, my heart and my eyes on things that are above to make Jesus what I'm after, to be identified and created and made by Jesus Christ. I am to have singular purpose and outlook on Christ. And multiple times a week, I wake up and I'm not doing that. Anybody else? Okay good, I'm in good company. And so that continues to happen. Now, it's happened less and less and less as I've followed Him more and more and more and tried to surrender more and more, but it still happens. I'll still wake up and care about this more than I should. I'll wake up and have all my attention, all my worry going this direction instead of the direction it should. We fail at this often. If we're honest, probably daily. All I'm saying is that I become aware of it a couple of times a week. It's probably always there to some degree or another. This is why I love that he puts this next line in, look at verse 2 again. "Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

I love Paul for this because here is what he is saying, "Don't forget, regardless how long you follow Him, no matter how long you've been walking with Christ, don't forget that you died with Him also and that your life is hidden with Christ in God. Don't forget that you're justified, not by how well you follow, but you are justified by Christ alone. Don't forget it." It's why Paul constantly preaches the gospel to people who already knew the gospel. He's saying, "Don't forget you can't earn this." Here's why a mark of Christian maturity is when you stumble and fall you run to God and it results in more worship. A sign of immaturity is that when you stumble and fall you run from God, try to fix yourself up and run back to Him, which in the end creates this strange life where you press into Him when you are doing well and run away from Him when you are struggling. That makes those times of struggle very dark, very difficult and very dry. A mark of Christian maturity is, "I can't believe I failed Him again. How good is He that He loves me even in this? How good is He that He

would love me, call me His own, adopt me and love me in this state?" And it's a mark of Christian maturity to stumble and fail and that ultimately leads into more worship and lead into a greater intimacy with God as we're more aware of His love because He continues to love us in our failure.

Now let's wrap this thing up with a scary yet good verse. It's kind of a crescendo here so let's look at it. It might not feel that way to you but we'll read it and we'll talk about it. "When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." So the Second Advent is coming. Christmas is the first advent. They're waiting on the Messiah, the Messiah comes, He dies on the cross, He purchases our souls and He absorbs all of God's wrath so that all that was in God's wrath ultimately disappears. There is victory over death now. Death has no sting, no victory. Disease has lost its power. All of that, Christ has purchased all of that in the cross. We live between the two advents in what theologians would call "already not yet." So it's already paid for but it's has not been consummated yet. So the day is coming when Christ returns and the Bible makes that great day of the Lord a pretty scary even for most of humanity. Most of humanity will want mountains to fall on them to hide them, and there will be no place to hide. Every act of treason, every act of rebellion, every errant word, every bit of wickedness, every bit of self exaltation, every bit of narcissism, every act of "forget You, God. I'm smarter than You," is laid bare before you and God. And just if we look at this from a biblical perspective, more godly, more righteous people than you and me will ever be got to see God face to face and fell on the ground absolutely terrified. Isaiah, who was upright man of God, sees God, falls on the ground and says, "Woe is me." The same word is used later when Jesus says to the Pharisees, "Woe is you; woe is you." So you've got this idea of "woe." He's saying, "Woe is me." Why? "Because I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King." So at once glance at Jesus Christ, at God enthroned, Isaiah falls on the ground and is terrified and says, "Woe is me." John, according to tradition, is boiled alive and doesn't die and also, for the record, doesn't recant. He doesn't say, "We made it all up." He doesn't die, so they exile him to Patmos. He sees Jesus in a vision and falls on the ground like a dead man. So you and I, probably on any plane you want to lay down – moral, knowledge of Scripture, spiritual gifting, we are probably not going to be in the same league as those two guys in particular. And yet, both of them see God and are terrified. The day is coming where God's patience is gone, His abounding love has been poured out in the elect and it will be over. And when that happens, He's going to crack the sky, He's going to come back and He's going to judge and all that we have done will be revealed. There will be no place to hide. There will be no lies that work. Every motivation exposed. So basically, the file drawer opens up, I don't think there is literally a file drawer, this is an illustration. And here we start reading every wicked thought and every wicked action. And on that day, we're going to want a Champion. On that day, we are going to want someone to go, "Uh huh, paid in full. I paid for that. I paid for that. I paid for that." So Paul says we are serious about the things of God and we pursue God seriously, because when Christ is revealed in all His glory we want to be raised with Him. We want someone to step in at that moment and say, "I paid for that. I absorbed that. What was due that, I paid for in full."

Let me ask a couple of questions, then I'll pray and we'll move into a time of responding to God in song and worship. Last week I asked where is your identity, where do you find your identity? I think the question I want to ask tonight is, if you have been raised with Christ, is there a seriousness in you about the things of God? Are you legitimately pursuing Him, chasing Him, growing into the fullness of Him? If you are mindset on Him, how does that work itself out in your life? Because it's real easy in church to go, "Of course, pastor. Of course my minds set on Christ." Okay, my question is, "How?" Can you answer that for you? You don't have to answer that for me, but you do need to answer that for you. How are you going about having your mind transformed and your heart stirred up for the things of God? And this, coming here, coming into service, that might very well be one of those, but I'm asking, on a day to day basis, as you live your life, what are you doing that sets your mind on things that are above? And if the answer is nothing, then I have to wonder what you really are looking at, staring at and chasing after. I think you'd have a hard time stretching your case to be, "I'm really after Jesus Christ." "How are you doing that?" "Um, I'm not." And so I wonder if there needs to be some repentance tonight. I wonder if Paul might have exposed some of us as playing games with God. I wonder if some of us have been

in church too long and so that we've learned Christianese and we've learned how to behave and we know all the right answers and haven't applied any of those answers to our own lives. And I wonder how many of us will be serious about the fact that there will be a day where the glory of Christ shines in its fullness and we will be held to account. And on that day we want to be raised with Him.

Let's pray. "Father, thank You for these men and women. I thank You that this sermon ends kind of like it began, that we have to consider and look at whether or not we are raised with You. So my hope and my desire, Father, is that You would illuminate the parts of our heart that are dark. My hope is that You would illuminate the parts of our mind that are not focused on You and that do not see You as lovely, that do not see you as worthy, that are not in pursuit of You. Forgive us for our laziness. Forgive us for our indifference. And create in us a heart, like David's in psalm 27 that says, 'There is only one thing that I ask, there is only one thing that I am seeking, to dwell in the house of Lord all the days of my life.' So give us that kind of hunger for You, that kind of desire for You, that kind of passion for You. Help us, Jesus. We need You. And it's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

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