

## **If You Believe It...Then Live It**

**Colossians 3: 1-4**

Pastor Bryan Clark

Over the years, I've watched as people trust Christ as Savior and some people seem to just flourish in their Christian walk while others seem to struggle with their ups and downs year after year after year. And then there are those people who seem like they don't even quite get out of the starting block. They just don't seem to really experience the life of Christ. And over the years I've tried to ask the question: What makes the difference between the one that seems to struggle every step of the way and the one that seems to flourish in his or her Christian walk. This may be a little oversimplified, but I think at the end of the day, the difference has to do with what one believes to be true.

When I talk about belief, I'm talking about at the core of your being what you believe. Our belief system isn't ultimately just what we say we believe. It's not hard to give lip service to different doctrines and beliefs. It's not really knowing the right answer to put on a test. At the end of the day, your belief system is really revealed by how you live. Everyone at the end of the day lives their belief system. You live the way you do because of what you believe deep at the core of your being. Let's take for example this doctrine that Paul has been teaching in the Book of Colossians on the sufficiency of Christ, this belief that Jesus is adequate, Jesus is sufficient, Jesus is everything you need. It would be interesting, if we were to take a poll, how many of us would say, "I believe that. I believe that." And yet so often our behavior gives us away.

It can be seen in a number of different ways. The fact that we don't really believe in the sufficiency of Jesus can be found in this restlessness, this searching, this pursuing, where if we were to be honest there still seems to be something missing and there's evidence in our life that we're still looking for something else. We're still searching for something more. We're looking for that thing that will ultimately satisfy. It might be seen in a very unhealthy pursuit of success and money and stuff. There's nothing wrong with money and there's nothing wrong with stuff, but if there is this drive within us that is unhealthy to just accumulate more, to make more, to have more stuff, deep down we do that because we believe in our heart of hearts that there's something that stuff or that money will deliver that Jesus can't deliver. That's why we live that way.

Maybe you're a young person in high school or college, and you find yourself often running with a crowd that you know you probably shouldn't be running with and making choices that you know you probably shouldn't be making, but you find yourself doing it over and over again. It's because you do not believe Jesus can deliver the goods. You believe there's something that can be gained in that crowd, in that acceptance, in that environment that can deliver something to you that Jesus can't deliver.

For some, maybe it's how you spend your money – credit cards that are racked up with all kinds of debt, a pattern of mismanagement of your money. There's something going on there. It isn't just a mathematical problem. There's something deep in the core of your belief system where you believe somehow that stuff is going to deliver to you what Jesus can't deliver.

Maybe some of you here struggle with an addiction, maybe its internet pornography, alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, whatever it is. We have all our reasons for excusing our behaviors, but at the end of the day what keeps that addiction going is you've convinced yourself there's something that addiction is going to deliver that Jesus can't deliver.

The reality is, our behavior often gives us away and indicates that we really don't believe in the sufficiency of Christ. That's why we live like we live. Well that's what Paul wants to talk to us about today. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Colossians chapter 3. Many of you may be aware that many of these epistles, especially these shorter letters from Paul, are organized in a way that they're front-loaded with doctrine and back-loaded with application. Colossians is certainly that way, meaning the first two chapters are really heavily loaded with Bible doctrine, with these magnificent truths – in this case about the sufficiency of Jesus – that Jesus is all we need. Jesus will ultimately satisfy. And now starting in chapter 3 and on into chapter 4, it's the practical application, the living out of these magnificent truths.

Most of the epistles are organized this way. Paul lays out the foundational doctrines, and then at the end of the book he talks about what it looks like lived out in life. Now the challenge is, often times we want to skip to the back half of the epistles. In other words, we really aren't that interested in the doctrine and the truths, what we want to know is the application: How do I fix my marriage? How do I fix my family? How do I satisfy this? How do I satisfy that? If you don't believe me, just go into any Christian book store and you'll find that ninety percent of all of the books on the shelves deal with the back half of the epistles, the practical how-to. Very few of them ever deal with the front half of the epistles which is the foundation, the doctrine.

Now, what happens is when we read those books, when we stick to the back half of these epistles, what we're trying to find is a methodology. What we're trying to find is some sort of a technique, what we're trying to find is something that we can do that will fix things, that will make things better. But at the end of the day, all we're really doing is trying to find some sort of methodology, some sort of a technique, something we can do in our flesh that will make life better. And Paul ends chapter 2 of Colossians saying that the flesh has no value against fleshly indulgences. In other words, at the end of the day, those techniques, those methods, those principals simply will not work without an understanding of the truth that has to be the foundation out of which our behavior flows.

With that in mind we pick it up in Colossians chapter 3 verse 1:

**Therefore...**

So just coming off this discussion about legalism, especially that final statement that the flesh has no value against these fleshly indulgences, so what does give us the power to rise above our habits and our fleshly ways? Well that's what he's going to talk about.

**Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (\*NASB Col. 3:1)**

**“If you have been raised up with Christ”**...we have seen Paul use this technique throughout the Book of Colossians and is actually very common throughout all of his epistles where he uses this phraseology where he says *“if”* not meaning it may or may not be true, but *“if this is true and we know it is.”* Now it does raise the question: Why would he write it that way? Some of the translations translate it *“since”* which is a pretty good translation. That is what he’s saying, *“Since we know this is true...”* But you have to remember, 2000 years ago it was still an oral tradition, meaning believers did not have the luxury of sitting down with a Bible in their lap and reading it. They heard it read to them. So they couldn’t highlight, they couldn’t bold-face, they couldn’t underline. You had to use oral techniques in order to emphasize something. So in this particular technique it’s a way of underscoring the message. When he says, *“If you have been raised up with Christ, and we know that you have been,”* there’s a double emphasis to that that actually rather than having it be something he’s unsure of, it’s double emphasized. There’s this underscore *“and we know this is true”*. So that’s what he’s saying here. *“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, and we know that you have been.”*

He’s been talking about that in chapters 1 and 2. He’s been celebrating the fact that they have trusted Christ as Savior, that they have died to their old ways, that they have been raised up in this new life in Jesus. In chapter 2 verse 12 and in chapter 2 verse 20 he talked about the fact that they have died to the old way, died to the performance driven way to somehow merit favor with God or to live a better life and have been buried with Christ and now raised up to a newness of life. So it’s a whole new life, a whole new power, a whole new way of living, and he’s saying, **“If that’s true of you and you have been raised up with Christ [then what] then keep seeking the things above, where Christ is”**. It’s very important where that comma comes in this verse. The original language, of course, didn’t have the comma, so it’s a translators call, but the emphasis is not here where Christ is seated, it’s **“where Christ is [comma] seated at the right hand of God.”** The emphasis is not on a place, the emphasis is on a person. And what he’s saying here is that we keep seeking the things above where Christ is. In other words, our focus is on Him.

This idea of “seeking” is an interesting word. Some of the translations have “set your heart,” which is a pretty good translation. This word “seeking” means “to seek passionately.” It means “to seek from your heart,” it means “to seek with all of your being.” And so what he’s saying here is, *“if it’s true that you now have this new life with Christ, then passionately, deep in your heart, seek the things above where Christ is.”* In other words, seek Him seated at the right hand of God. The idea of **“seated at the right hand of God”** is really not so much a statement of location or geography. It’s a statement of position. At the right hand of God is a position of power. It’s a position of glory. It’s a position of majesty and exaltation. You remember the false teachers were trying to convince the believers in Colossae that Jesus is a good thing but Jesus is not enough. You need Jesus plus some other stuff, some other religion, some other beliefs, some other pursuits. And so what Paul is saying is that Jesus is at the right hand of God with all power, with all glory, with all fullness. He is sufficient. He is adequate. He’s made this case throughout the book, that Jesus has everything He needs to be sufficient for everything you need.

What he’s saying in verse 1 is worth stopping and pondering, because what he’s saying is this: along the way, you became convinced that in your own flesh, in your own performance, in your own trying hard, you recognized that you could not do enough. That rather than your performance meriting you some sort of favor with God, it’s the very thing that condemns you before God, and the reality is you finally died to that way of thinking and believed that Jesus was sufficient to forgive your sin, to make you right before God, and to resurrect you to this whole new way of life. What he’s saying is if you really believe that and are raised up with Christ, then the evidence of

that should be that you are passionately, diligently, pursuing Christ. In other words, if I really believe with all my heart that Jesus is sufficient to meet my every longing, my every need, my every fear, my every struggle, that he is adequate for my significance and my meaning and purpose, that Jesus really is sufficient, if I believe that in my heart of hearts, it would translate into a passionate, diligent pursuing of Christ.

So let me ask you the logical question: could you say this past week that your life was characterized by an all out passionate, diligent pursuit of Jesus like one pursues a lover? It's easy as Christians to kind of fall back into our routines. We have our quiet time, maybe two or three times a week, maybe read our Bible, maybe we don't, offer up a few prayers but they're usually give me, and give me, and give me, and other than that we go to church and there isn't a whole lot more to it than that. Would you say that it is evident that you believe Jesus is sufficient to meet your every need? The answer would be absolutely not. If you believe that with your heart of hearts, you would go after Him with every fiber of your being. You would pursue Him with every ounce of strength you have because you know at the end of the day only He can satisfy. At the end of the day, only He can meet that need. At the end of the day, only He can conquer that fear. At the end of the day, only He can bring that peace. If I really believe that, I would pursue Him with every ounce of my being. The fact that we don't gives evidence that we really don't believe in the sufficiency of Jesus nearly as much as we think we do. That's why we live the way we live.

There is this pattern in Paul's writing, this correlation between what's called the indicative mood of the verbs and the imperative mood of the verbs. Now I know you're just thrilled to know that. We always try to give you a little information that you can use in the break room tomorrow morning to impress your friends. So just say to them, "You know, what do you think about that relationship between the indicative and the imperative?" And they'll say, "What?" Kind of like you're saying to me right now. The indicative mood is simply a statement of fact. The imperative mood is an action or a response. So throughout this text, Paul is stating a fact and how we should respond to it. So what you have is the fact is you have been raised up with Christ. The response then, **"keep seeking [passionately, diligently seeking] the things above where Christ is [in other words, Christ himself] seated at the right hand of God."** **"Seated at the right hand of God"** is the statement of fact. How do we respond to that?

Verse 2:

**Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**

Because Christ is seated at the right hand of God, there is this, in essence, heavenly value system – this value system which is the hope of the Gospel that is rooted in the very person of God Himself. So you have this idea of a heavenly value system then you have an earthly value system. What he's saying is if it's true that Christ is your sufficiency and Christ then is the essence of heaven, then you should have your mind set on things above – in other words, *that* value system rather than the value system of this earth.

Paul reminded us in chapter 2 that we died to the value system of this earth. We died to this way of thinking that somehow I could be my own sufficiency and somehow the things of this earth could satisfy my longing and my needs and my desires. We realized that that value system was bankrupt and we abandoned it and we embraced a

new value system. And so he's reminding us of that and if that's true, then we must set our minds – the word literally means “we must think a new value system.”

Now this is the challenge that we face. We live out our faith in this world and the value system of this world is marketed at us every single day and is very compelling and it's very convincing. And unless we are very diligent to think a different value system, our default mode will cause us to simply live out the earthly value system that at one time we acknowledged doesn't work.

You remember in Colossians chapter 1 when Paul was writing to the believers in Colossae, he said, “I'm writing to those that are in Christ in Colossae.” And I told you at the beginning that's the problem. It's trying to understand what it means to be **in Christ** in Lincoln, **in Christ** in the marketplace, **in Christ** in your neighborhood, **in Christ** in your school. That is the challenge because the momentum of the world is going one direction and it is very, very hard to think a different value system. And that's what Paul is saying here, that we need to set our minds; we need to be very diligent every day to have disciplined minds to think truth. There is no way to successfully live out this Christian life without a disciplined mind because the battle always revolves around truth. And so what Paul is saying is, *“If you really do believe that Jesus is sufficient, you will pursue Him passionately and you will set your mind, you will determine yourself to think according to a completely different value system in order to experience the truth of God.”*

**Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.** (v. 2)

Verse 3:

**For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

**“For you have died...”** He told us this in chapter 2. We died to the value system of this world. We died to any idea that we could save ourselves. We realized that doesn't work and we died. Then **“your life is hidden with Christ in God.”** In other words, this resurrected life is now with Christ in God. This word “hidden” is an interesting word here. It has a couple of different meanings that aren't all that different. It carries the idea of being hidden in the sense of putting something away where it's safe – we would maybe use the phrase “burglar proof” – of taking a treasure and hiding it somewhere where it's safe, where it isn't going to be stolen, it isn't going to be lost.

So you have this magnificent truth that your life has been hidden away with Christ in God in such a way that it's safe. It's a treasure. It's not going to be lost. The grammar here is that it's a *perfect passive*, which basically means God did the hiding, not you – *perfect* meaning the results will go on indefinitely. God has hidden you safely away in Christ and you will stay that way indefinitely. But the word also carries this idea of concealment. When something's hidden, it's also concealed. You don't see it. It's hidden.

The reality is, the moment you trusted Jesus as Savior, you were hidden with Christ in God. The most amazing, radical things happened to you. You were actually born again. The old you died. The old nature died. The sin nature died and you were

resurrected to a miraculous new life in Christ. You have available to you this warehouse of riches beyond anything this world has to offer. They're simply yours on the basis of God's grace because you're *in Christ*. You are now a citizen of heaven. You're no longer a citizen of earth. You're an alien. You're a pilgrim. You're a stranger, you're just passing through but your hope is that you have a seat at the table. God has prepared this banqueting table in heaven, we learned in chapter 1, and there between Moses and Abraham is a seat with your name on it and God has reserved that seat for you and it's yours. And that is your promise for eternity – a future more glorious than anything you can imagine today. And that's all true of you, but we would have to say it's concealed.

When you walk into the grocery store, people don't gasp and say, "Look! An alien! A child of God. A stranger, a pilgrim, a citizen of heaven!" They don't look at you and say, "You know, that guys got more eternal wealth than anyone on this earth." People don't identify any of that stuff. You're just you. And as you live out this new value system in Christ, it doesn't make sense to people. They don't understand why you live the way you live, why you do what you do with your time, why you do what you do with your money, why you do what you do in living out your life. It seems odd to them. You've kind of become a fanatic. This whole thing has gotten out of control. I mean, they go to church on weekends and that's a nice thing, but you've taken it too far. And now you've become some sort of fanatic and they just don't understand. And what they don't realize is everything that's true of you right now is concealed. They just don't get that.

Look at what it says in verse 4:

**When Christ, who is our life, [in other words, Christ who is everything that we're living for because He's our sufficiency] is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**

There's about four or five different Greek words that are used to describe the return of Jesus. Each word has some different purpose to it, but this particular Greek word is a word specifically meant to identify that when Jesus returns, there will be this unveiling, this revelation. It will be made known who Jesus is. And so you have this spectacular promise that someday Jesus is going to come back and when He comes back, the curtain is going to be pulled back and people will know that this is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Today, people don't understand that. You can make fun of Christianity. You can't make fun of any other world religion, but it's fair game to make fun of Christianity. And they laugh about Jesus, and they make fun of Christians and because God doesn't strike them dead, people think that God must not be in His heaven and it lulls people to sleep. But there is coming a day when that curtain is going to be opened up and Jesus is going to step on the scene, and in that moment, there will be no atheists, there will be no agnostics, there will be nobody promoting that all roads lead to heaven. It will be abundantly clear there is one King of Kings. There is one Lord of Lords and it is Jesus Christ. And amazingly enough, in that moment of glory, he says not only will He be revealed but you will be revealed with Him. In that moment, the curtain will be pulled back and people will gasp at who you have become in Christ. It may today be very well concealed. But there is coming a day when it's going to be peeled back and you can't even imagine what you have become in Christ. And you will share in His glory then and forever.

If we know that's true, if we know who wins in the end, if we know that even though today this world doesn't understand my value system, they don't understand why I live the way I live, they think I'm some sort of fanatic; I still know at the end of the day the curtain's going to be rolled back and they're going to understand when it's too late why I live the way I live because of what I knew to be true. If I really know this, if I really believe this, how could it not dramatically affect the way I live every day? If I know this is true, how could I possibly embrace a losing, earthly value system that at the end of the day I know can't deliver the goods and only leads to more heartache and pain?

Several years ago during the summer Olympics, our family was keeping track of a certain distance runner. We had tracked him all the way through the trials and now into the Olympics, and it was the day of the final race for the gold medal. I remember walking into the house right before the race started and Patti and the girls were all gathered around the TV and the race began. I was standing there watching the race, and fairly quickly the runner fell behind. They're cheering him on, and I'm just coolly and calmly watching the race. I'm giving them a little strategic advice, "You know, I can tell by the way he's running he's fine. That's part of his strategy. You know, look at how smoothly he's running, and the leaders are laboring. No problem." So the race keeps going, and he seems like he's getting farther behind, and they're getting more panicky, and I'm just as cool and calm as I can be. I'm kind of calling the race, "Everything's going to work out," and "I can tell he's in great shape. Nothing to worry about," and in the last lap he finally gets his kick and he passes everybody up, crosses the finish line to win the race and gets the gold medal. And of course, they're all cheering, and at the end of the cheering, Patti looked at me and said, "How did you know?" I said, "Well, the Olympics are on a time delay and I heard on the radio earlier today who had won the race."

But you know, once you know who wins, it dramatically changes how you watch the race. If we know that's true, if we know at the end of the day that Jesus will be revealed in all of His glory, and it's this heavenly value system that wins the day, how could it not change the way we live every day?

With that in mind I want you to think about two questions as we close. Number one: could you say this past week that with all of your strength you passionately pursued Jesus? You believed so strongly in the deepest part of your being that only Jesus could satisfy, only Jesus could meet that need, only Jesus can take care of you, only Jesus can give you what you're looking for, and you believe that so deeply that the thing that defined your behavior this past week more than anything else was this relentless, passionate pursuit of Jesus as one would pursue a lover? If you believe in the sufficiency in Jesus, there is no other way to live. That only makes sense.

And second of all: would you say that you lived this last week with a disciplined mind aware every day that you are living out a heavenly value system on this earthly battlefield, and because of that you're aware every day that: *I must have a disciplined mind that I not fall back into the value system of this world, but that I embrace a heavenly value system in order that my behaviors, my choices, my value of life might accurately reflect my belief that Jesus is coming back and when He comes back, He's going to pull back the curtain and for the first time the world will know this is why we were living the way we were living.* It's easy to say, "I believe in the sufficiency of Jesus." But if we don't live it, we don't really believe it.

*Our Father, we're thankful that when we were lost and helpless in our sins, Jesus died for us. We died to our own way of thinking; we died to our old way of living and were raised to a newness of life. Lord, this Jesus that sits majestically at the right hand of God, this Jesus by which creation was made by Him and for Him but also in Him, this Jesus that is so big and so powerful and so sufficient longs today to meet our every need. Lord, that's easy to say, but it's kind of hard to believe. Lord, I pray for each one of us that we would really, diligently pursue You with every ounce of passion and energy that we have, believing that You alone are sufficient, that You alone can satisfy, that You alone can give us what we need, and Lord, that You would give us keen, disciplined minds. Lord, it's really hard to live a heavenly value system here on this battleground on earth, but Lord, I pray that You would give us keen minds to be disciplined to believe the truth, to live the truth for Your glory. Lord, we look forward to that day when Jesus returns, when every knee will bow, when every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Until that day, find us faithful. In Jesus' name amen.*

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**Study Questions**  
*Complete in Christ: A Study in the Book of Colossians*  
**If You Believe It...Then Live It**  
**Colossians 3:1-4**  
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**Opening Discussion**

1. At the end of the day what we believe is really determined by how we live, not what we say we believe. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. How many of our struggles and poor choices in life are a result of failing to truly believe what we say we believe?
3. What does the sufficiency of Christ mean to you? In what ways do our lifestyles and choices reflect a failure to truly believe in the sufficiency of Christ?

**Bible Study**

1. Review what you've learned so far from Colossians 1-2.
2. Read Colossians 3:1-4. What does the "Therefore" refer to in 3:1?
3. Compare 3:1 with 2:20. What did we "die" to and what does it mean to be "raised up with Christ?"
4. There is a grammatical relationship between the indicative mood and the imperative mood for the verbs in these verses. The indicative is the statement of fact and the imperative is the command based on that fact. What are the statements of fact in 3:1-4 and what are the commands based on those facts?
5. In practical terms, what does it mean to "keep seeking things above," and "set your mind on things above, not things that are on the earth?" What does that look like on a daily basis?
6. What does Paul mean when he says that our lives "will be revealed with Him in glory?" How does this truth help us to live counter to the value system of this world?