

Using Your Mind

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[0 : 00] Our Scripture reading this morning from which the teaching, our sermons based is Colossians 3, verses 1 to 4. So, it's printed in your bulletin. It'll be on the screens as well if you'd like to use that. There's also Bibles around on tables. If you'd like to grab a Bible, you can do that too.

And I'm going to ask Douglas to come and read for us. If then 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. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will appear, you will also will appear with Him in glory.

We're starting a new series today called Practicing the Christian Life. So, the hope is that every single January for the next three years, we'll do this series, Practicing the Christian Life. I say three years because as some of you were praying, we were awaiting a visa approval so that we could stay here, and that did come in this week. So, I can say that, Lord willing, we will do this series the next three years. Can't say any more than that, but that's as long as the visa lasts.

Next three years, we'll do this series. What we're going to do is look at Paul's lists. Paul has at least six lists throughout his letters, and they're all about change. They're all about practicing the Christian life. They're all about what it looks like to live as a Christian. And so, each January, I hope to just work through one of these lists. This January, Colossians 3, verses 1 to 17. This is one of the most foundational of these lists. What does it look like to practice the Christian life? Paul lays it out for us right here. And so, let's look at it together this month. Today, just the first four verses, what the Christian life is all about. First, he's going to show us that change, real change, always requires an if-then. And then, that there's a motivation. This is the most important thing today, that there's a motivation for real change in your life. And then, lastly, there's a Christian mindset to change that you need. So, let's look at those three things. First, the first thing he says to us is that we all have an if-then that is the basis of change. Now, I know that's enigmatic. I know that's a puzzling way to say it. But if you look down at verse 1, he says, if then you've been raised with

Christ, seek the things that are above. Or it could be translated, if you have been raised with Jesus Christ, then seek the things that are above. And he goes on after that to say, don't seek the things that are on the earth. So, if you're a Christian, if you're a Christian, seek the things that are above, not the things on earth. Now, is Paul saying, if you're a Christian, you need to forget about the physical life. You need to, you know, forget about work, forget about eating, forget about all these things. You need to focus on the spiritual, the heavenly. Seek the things above, not the things on earth. No, he's absolutely not saying that. What is he saying? He's saying instead that if you were to back up, if you have a Bible, you can do this, back up to chapter 2, verse 20. He said something almost identical to this. If you've been raised with Christ, put away the elemental spirits of the world, the elemental things of the world. And that's Paul's way of specifically talking to the Colossians. Because in Colossae, just like everywhere else in the Greco-Roman world, the city was dominated by worship of the pagan gods, of going to the temple and worshiping Zeus and Aphrodite and

[3 : 49] Artemis and all sorts of Greco or Roman gods. And he's saying, if you've become a Christian, if you've experienced repentance, then you've got to put away the elemental spirits. That's just a Greek way of talking about all the things you might worship that are on the ground, under the sun, not in the above.

So when he says, seek the things above, he's saying, seek God who stands above the ground. In other words, he's saying, if you've become a Christian, you've been called to stop worshiping, to put away anything anything that you might have made into a God that is a creature. Anything on the ground, anything material, even an angel. You might have worshiped an angel. Some of the Colossians did. But he says, even them, they're creatures. And so if you've become a Christian, if

you've been raised with Christ, you've been called to put away worship of anything that is underneath God's existence, because it's creaturely. Now, what does that mean? Let me say this. It means that every single person, Paul is saying, this is the presupposition of this passage, every single person has a God, an if, a conversion story, where you've been converted to worshipping something in your life, something, something under the sun, something creaturely, that has led to your then. If you've converted to X, seek this. In other words, every single one of us has something we worship, a God we worship. And it determines what we think about change in this life. It determines the goal of change. It determines what we really want and how we pursue it, how we chase after it. And Paul is saying, look, first off, you just got to say, I've got that in my life. If you're not a Christian today, what I want to say is, I hope you avoid the very silly thing, which we all can do sometimes, and that's say, you know, religious people. They're converted. They talk about conversion. If you've been raised with Christ, you're converted. And I'm not converted. I'm not religious. I'm not a convert. I'm a free thinker.

And Paul is saying, you can't say that. You've got to realize that you're a convert. You have an if. Whatever you're following is your if, and it leads to your then, the way you practice your life, the thing you worship most, the thing you chase after. Let me give you an example.

Richard Dawkins. This is a bit of an extreme example. I'll give you a non-extreme example in just a sec. The extreme example, Richard Dawkins was being interviewed by Larry Taunton a few years back, and Larry Taunton asked him, what is your ultimate goal in your career? And he says, Dawkins, the very famous atheist who wrote *The God Delusion*, other books like that, he said, I think my ultimate goal would be to convert people away from particular religions toward a rationalist skepticism, tinged with, and then he stopped and he said, wait, no, that's too weak, he said, correcting himself.

My goal is to convert people to glorify in the universe and to glorify in themselves. Yes, I would really like people to be converted away from religion to skepticism so that they could glorify the universe and glorify themselves. Now, what is he saying? He's saying, if you become a rationalist, materialist skeptic, it's not that you don't have religion. Boy, I'm glad he said this. It's not that you don't have religion. It's that you've converted to glorifying the universe and glorifying your own self, things on the ground, things under the sun, things below the heavenly realm. And Colossians 3 is written to Christians, but in order to really get into this, if you've been raised with Christ, you've got to see you're a convert. And the if, what is the if doing there? The if is asking you, if you've been raised with Christ, have you? Have you converted to Christ? Have you been raised with Christ? Have you by faith come to Jesus? That's what the if is doing there. It's asking you, or are you simply following things that are on the ground, creaturely things? I read a Forbes article. Here's a more normal life example. I read a Forbes article, and it said this. It was talking about advertisement and branding and marketing. And it said, the author was a madman, a marketing agent, and he said, to really sell a product, you need to know people from the inside out. You're not selling them a product, you're converting them to a lifestyle. The focus is not the product. The focus is conversion. Only this product can give you the change, the desire from the inside out that you really are looking for. I'm not selling Apple. I'm trying to get people to see that if they convert from Android to Apple, it will be the change in their life that really matters for them. And you see, the elemental spirits, we all have them. They're objects of worship. And it's whenever you say, if I have that, I will get the goal, the change in my life that will make me into what I really want, to glorify myself. That's what Dawkins is selling.

[8 : 56] That's what every advertisement out here on Prince's Street is selling. And Paul is saying, do you have an if that is much, much greater than the elemental spirits, the things on the ground?

Do you have an if that says you've been converted to Christ? In other words, do you have faith in something greater than the things below? And boy, Dawkins is saying, I want people to be converted to what I think skepticism, because I want them to be able to glorify in the universe. Well, there is a lot of glory in the universe. Absolutely. A lot of wonder in the universe. But boy, what if I'll tell you what you can have, you can have not only glory in the universe, you can have glory in the one who made the universe. And that is far better. That's far greater. Do you have that if, have you been converted?

Have you been raised with Christ? That's the first question. It's the presupposition. Now, the meat today is this. Secondly, if you're a Christian, there is a unique motivation in your life to change. What is it? That's really what Paul's focused on here. Now, this list is from verse 1 to 17, how to

practice the Christian life, how to change. As I've looked through sermons that other people have done on Colossians, what's been the most common thing is that people tend to either teach verses 1 to 14 or 1 to 17 all at once. Of course, that's good. That's very doable.

But at the same time, what I want to do is really slow down and say that there's so much content here, there's so much detail here about what it looks like to practice the Christian life and to have deep change in your life as a Christian that you cannot go fast with this. You've got to go really slowly, step by step. We're going to do it for four weeks because you've got to go step by step. You know, if you want to change in your life in a really meaningful way, all of you know that that is slow. If you want to get fit, boy, don't we wish that losing weight happened a lot faster than it does, right? The process. It never goes as quickly as you want it to, right? And don't we know that I wish I could just learn, I wish I could download Duolingo and learn a language this month. But if you only use Duolingo, I'm here to tell you, you will never learn a new language, okay? Sorry to Duolingo.

[11:26] No, it's good. But real change is deep commitment over long stretches of time. And boy, we're willing sometimes to do that with fitness. We're willing sometimes to do that with language learning. But the most important change that we need in our lives as Christians is to be conformed to the image of the sun. And are we willing to take the time to slow down, to be committed to that? The most important change we need in our lives. This is what Paul tells us we need. What's the motivation? That's what he's talking about here in these four verses, the motivation to pursue change in your life towards Christ. That's the big thing he's saying here. What is your motivation to change as a Christian? Okay, the idea here of change and the motivation for it is so different from every world religion, every philosophy, every self-help book, everything you pick up at the bookstore. It's so different. And here's what it is. He says this, verse one, if you have been raised with Christ, and then if you look down just after that at verse three, he says also, for you have died with Christ. And then if you were to look just a little bit later in this list, the 17 verses, he says, you have already put off the old self and you have already put on the new self. So if you, these are the three big statements he makes. If you have already been raised with Christ, if you've already died with Christ, if you've already put off the old self and put on the new self, all in the past tense, Paul is saying, if you are a Christian today, if you believe in Jesus, the most important thing for you to see is that God has offered you and given, past tense, given you salvation long before you ever asked for it, long before you ever sought it, that it's past tense. The work is already done. It's already been completed. You know, when were you saved? You can say today that you truly became a Christian, that you were saved whenever you came to faith in this life right now, this present life. But it's very important to see here that he's saying something even bigger than that, that if you're a Christian, you were saved, you were raised with

Christ, you died with Christ at the very moment in the first century, sometime from 29 to 32 AD, we're not exactly sure which year it was, that moment, the moment that Jesus Christ died in the first century, you really did die. The moment that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in the first century, you were raised from the dead in the first century. In other words, he's saying that right now in the heavenly realm where Christ is seated on his throne next to God the Father, God the Father sees you as him. That God the Father sees you as so united to Jesus Christ that every single thing that is true of him from all of history is true of you at this very moment. Now that means that when you look into your heart and you see your sins and you see your struggles and you see the old self, as Paul will later put it, fighting against the new self, and you say, I am, I know that I am still very much a person of selfishness and greed and lust and anger and rage and impatience and I lack joy.

At the very same time, you can say, you can know that in the heavenly domain, your true life is hidden there with Christ and God the Father is looking at you through the lens of Jesus Christ and saying, you're an emerald, you're a diamond, you're already changed, you're already everything that you need to be.

In the eyes of God the Father, you're beautiful in every way from top to bottom because you are so united to Jesus Christ even in the very moment of his death, in the very moment of his resurrection. So he's trying to get you to see something of the motivation. Let me say it like this. If you, when he says, seek the things that are above, he's saying what you've got to do now in this life is rehearse that truth to yourself. Set your mind on what is true in the above realm where Christ is seated, that you're already an emerald.

[15 : 49] And he's saying, you've got to rehearse that. You've got to let that, use your mind to let that sink down into your heart. Let me put it philosophically. If you don't like philosophy and this is nothing but jargon, then forget about it. But what he's saying, what he's saying here is that the Christian does not need ontological change. You need epistemological change. You don't need a change in who you are, your identity, your being. You already have that in Christ. What you need in this life is to allow the knowledge of that to really take hold of your heart, to really take hold of your affections, to let it really grip you. Let me put it like this.

I think the best little phrase that he gives us in this passage is, your life is hidden with Christ. That's another way he puts it. Your life is hidden in the heavenly domain with Christ. What does that mean? In one of my favorite TV series of all time, one of my favorite TV series of all time is the show *Mad Men*. And one of the characters in *Mad Men* is so constrained by parenthood. She has a baby and her child is a toddler and she feels so burdened by parenthood, so constrained, so depressed in the midst of all the things going on in her life. That she runs away. She leaves her little one who's named Ellery, her little one, with another family member. And she runs away and she goes to this, this is the 70s, she goes to this commune. And she lives in this sort of cult commune where the story is you can be free here. Free from all relationship commitment. Free from all constraint. You can live any way you want day in and day out. There's no electricity there. They're in the country. They're getting back. It's Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea of the true self is living in the wild, living free, living without any commitment. And so she seeks that. And her parents, who did not do a good job as parents at all, and some of what she's going through is because she had pretty poor parents and they basically did the same thing to her by leaving her all the time for their careers. And so she's doing it.

But her parents come to her, they come out to this commune and they say to her, Margaret, you've got to come home. Why? You think that you have freedom here, but the truth is your life is with Ellery, your daughter. They say, you've got to come home because while you think you're free, actually real freedom, real freedom is being at home.

And home is wherever your life is and your daughter is your life. Now any parent knows that language. All of us do. Don't have to be a parent to say, you are my life. You are my life. What does Paul say?

He says, your life is hidden with Christ. How can he say it? Here's how he can say that. Because at Christmas, when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world and became flesh, and he went to the cross, when Jesus went to hang and die on the cross in your stead for your sins, what was he saying? He was saying to you in the middle of history, before you were ever even a thought in your parents' minds, he was saying, you are my life. When Jesus went to the cross, he said, you are my life. And Paul can say that Jesus is so serious about that, that today you can say, and so my life is with him. He said to me, you're my life. And so he died on the cross for me.

[19 : 27] And now you can say, my life is hidden in his life. It's wrapped up. He's home. He's home for me. And in the very last verse here, Paul says, you can't see that right now. It's literally hidden.

It's invisible to you. And so that's why you're struggling. That's why we struggle. It's what's true of us is invisible. But in verse four, it says, when he appears, you will see, you'll see that glory. You'll see that that's real. You'll see that that's true, that your life really is so bound up with his, that he is your home. Because he said, you are my life. Real change. I was reading this week, a book from a Scottish minister that he wrote in 1677, Henry Scougal. He's sort of a cult classic Christian writer that not very many people know about. But I found out this week that when you do read him, everybody gets obsessed with reading him. Partly because he dies when he's 28 years old. He was a minister just outside of Aberdeen. And he wrote this letter when he was 27 years old to a friend who was really struggling. And this letter became a famous book called *The Life of God and the Soul of Man*. And this is the book that George Whitefield read and came to Jesus. George Whitefield was converted through reading this book. And this is what Schugel says about the Christian life. He uses Colossians 3 to frame the Christian life. And this is what he writes about it. He says, when you become a Christian, you're a tree. You're a growing tree. And you're seeking to flourish.

And the roots of that tree, what are the roots of your tree? He says, they are now faith. Faith in the hidden, invisible reality that your life is hid with God in Jesus Christ. Colossians 3.

And then he says, and now the trunk of your tree, your growing tree, is growing in love for God and love for people. And he says, and then the two great branches of your growing tree are on the one

hand, purity, putting on what? Killing sin. That's next week. Come back. And then humility is the other branch. And that's week three of our study. He's all doing this from Colossians 3. Why the motivation to change? What is it? What is it? It's not, look, you will never sustain real sanctification, real growth in your life if the reason that you want to become more like Jesus, you want to change in your life, is because of guilt. You will never change on that basis. If it's because you say, you know, I've become a Christian and the collective church community expects me to behave in a way that's becoming of a Christian. You know, I don't want to embarrass, I don't want to embarrass people. I don't want to embarrass my local church community. I don't want to embarrass my parents, my family. I want to behave right. I want to be a good, respectable Christian, a decent public person. That will never sustain change. That's not real sanctification. That's not deep change. It can never be because you want to behave in a way that's becoming. It can never be because you don't want to give your family a bad name. It can never be, it can never be personal reputation protection. You can't let it be culture.

[22 : 42] You can't let the basis of real Christian change, motivation for sanctification to be because you don't, you don't want to be seen in this culture being a person that does X, Y, or Z. It can never be that. What is it? What's the basis, the motivation for change? It is the love of Jesus Christ for you.

It is that Jesus loves you so much that he came in the middle of history and says, you are my life. And so your life is wrapped up in my life. And you'll really, you really get deep motivation for change when you, when you set your mind on the things above to see that day in and day out, to seek that. And so let me close with this. Uh, the last thing, the mindset, and we'll be very brief, but the mindset, what's the command here? The command is if you see how much Jesus Christ says to you, I love you and your life is my life. Then the command now, Christian person in 2024, 2025, yes, 2025, probably do that two to three more times this month. In 2025, what, what can you do? What must you do? You've got to set your mind on that truth that is above. You've got to seek that truth. And you've got to, he's saying, you've got to use your mind to drive that truth down into your heart day in and day out. He's not talking about mere thinking. He's saying, you've got to have your affections reordered. You've got to have your heart changed and you've got to use your mind, set your mind on the things above. You've got to use your mind to get your heart to change and say, put on the character of Christ, put on what's true of you already in the heavenly realm, in this physical earthly realm today. So let me give you a couple ways to do that as we close. Uh, here's one broad example, one specific example, one broad example. You've got to wake up every day, wake up every day and say, self, your life is hidden with Christ. Self, seek the above today in all that you do in the earthly.

In other words, here's a more normal person way of saying it. All of us have like 20 different spheres that we live in all the time. We're, um, we're, we are national people. We have a national life. At the most basic level, we are either citizens or immigrants in this country. Um, we have a relationship to the government. We have a political opinion. We have a view of what's going on, uh, in the parliament. Uh, we have a political life. We have a national life. We have a domestic life. We have a house, a home. We're not. We have a family and children. We're married or we're single. Um, we have a work life or we're seeking that life. We have employment obligations. Uh, we have a life and a relationship. Boy, this is the best one to food. We have a time management life. We have a schedule. We have a calendar. We have apps. Some of us try to think very carefully about deleting apps and adding apps and put them on, on all the right pages on our phones so that we know where everything is. Your life has so many spheres, so many dimensions. What he's saying here is you've got to wake up every day and say, self, your spiritual life is the most important thing. Not to the, not to the neglect of all that. No, but that your spiritual life, your life hidden with Christ is what gives the information, the heart for everything else. That even the way you do your schedule has got to be motivated by your spiritual life. That is the most important thing. That's the broad example. Let me give you one specific. Um, maybe I know I can say, I know because I talked to you and I know myself that some of us, some of you struggle with, uh, guilt and shame from your past or from your present ongoing sins, struggles, and you have shame. You have guilt that you feel, and that emotion of guilt sits really heavily in the bottom of your heart. What does it mean to set your mind on the things above? What does it mean?

Um, it means that you've got to forgive yourself. You've got to let it go. Why? Because you've got to say, self, God in heaven is standing, the Father is standing with Jesus Christ. And, uh, what's going

on up there? Sometimes I think we think about it like this. The angels are looking down at us, and they're, um, seeing us struggle with this sin, that sin, that from our past that keeps coming up, keeps coming up.

[27 : 20] We keep acting into it. And the angels are saying, boy, very disappointing. Look at him, look at her. Same old story, different day. They can never get it together. They can never beat this. They can never change. They keep going back to the same old thing. And then we may think, well, but there's Jesus in the heavenly throne room at the right hand of God, and he's saying to the Father, but he's a good guy, you know? He's a pretty good, she's a pretty nice person most of the time. Let's let them off this time. That's how forgiveness works. No. No. Instead, Jesus Christ is standing in the heavenly throne room, and when you sin, every single time you sin, Jesus Christ says to the Father, as your intercessor and mediator, you demand justice, and I've paid the debt for them, and you promise injustice that you will not demand payment twice when payment has already been made. And so they have my blood. They have my life, Father. They're in me. My life is theirs, and their life is mine. And that means that if God the

Father will look at Jesus Christ and say, the debt is paid, the victory is won, who are you to say, but I can't forgive myself? If the cross was enough for God the Father, is the cross not enough for you to forgive somebody else, to forgive yourself? Let me close with one practice. Every week I'm going to give you one practice, one thing to actually do, and here it is. Very concrete. How do you take this up in the most concrete way? Christian meditation, that's the word the Puritans use. It's not vacating the mind of thought instead. It's preaching to yourself. It's talking to yourself. That's what he's talking about here. We sang last week the hymn, Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven. Even the title does it. Praise my soul. It's you talking to yourself. Praise my soul, the King of Heaven. The Psalms do it all over the place. That's the very concrete practice. So here's how you can take that into your life. When you wake up in the morning, don't touch your phone first. Put your phone on the other side of the room. Kneel down when you wake up at your bedside, on your knees if you're able, and take three to five minutes to set your mind on the things above in silence. To say first to yourself, talk to yourself first and say self. Your life is hidden with Christ. So today it's time to seek the things that are above, to be who you really are. And then let that roll into prayer for this very thing. This is not your devotional time. This is not your Bible reading time. This is not your time for praying about other people or the requests you have before the Lord. This is the three minutes you need at the beginning of the day on your knees to set your mind on the things above so that the rest of the day, your spiritual life can be the most important thing. And so you can say, I might not look like very much today. I don't look like the emerald. I know that. But my life is hidden with Christ. And when he appears, I'm so wrapped up with him that it will become visible. And I want that today in a little way. Let us pray. Father, Father, we ask that you would change us from the inside out. We pray, Lord, that you would teach us to be serious about change, but not because we want everybody to respect us, not because we want to think of you as some type of God who's saying, I got you, I'm going to get you. But instead, because the love of Jesus is so big that you, Jesus, said to us, you are my very life. May that be our motivation. May that be our heart from the inside out. Teach us, Lord, to take up this practice of setting our minds on the things of Christ, the things above, the true life. We pray that today in Jesus' name. Amen.