

12,10,20 Col. 3 vs. 1-4 Things Which Are Above

(See summation added at the end of these notes.)

In the passage we're looking at tonight, like last week, Paul lays a foundation of objective truth then explains the implications. I can't overemphasize the importance of this.

The only way you and I can enter into the good of who we are in Christ is to know both the facts and the implications of our new creation identity.

For example, there is no place in any of this, in any of what the Lord has done in recreating us in Christ, for legalism.

Christianity as a religion, trying to decide "What would Jesus do?" and then putting forth our best effort to imitate Him. That's simply the old creation, the flesh, trying to stay in control of our lives by adapting us to Christianity.

I have tried for years to convince people (mostly unsuccessfully) that after 2000 years of spiritual experimentation by Christians trying to understand and live the Christian life, we are now in a position so far removed from the early Church that it's barely recognizable as something associated with Christ in a spiritual way at all.

My appeal last week was simply to use our own experiences – our frustrations, confusion, guilt and fear – as evidence we could relate to, to show that our current spiritual life is not what Christ has provided for us through our union with Christ.

I still don't know how so many Christians can study the Bible, especially the book of Acts, and continue to go on, business as usual, as if what we are doing in the 21st century is more or less a match for what we saw happened in the 1st century.

We, in our generation, know way more theologically than most of the first-generation Christians, but they we're moving in God's will and we're just sitting around knowing things.

None of what I am saying is meant to make us feel horrible about ourselves. We are what we are; we shouldn't pretend to be something we're not. Pretending is one of the biggest 'movements' in all of Christianity these days.

It's meant to do two things – bring us face-to-face with reality (that we are not living in the good of what's possible) and second, to create a hunger that brings us into a much more determined pursuit of the truth.

God has every intention of recovering what's been lost and He is already doing so in many parts of the world.

He will do this with us also; if we take the promise of Jer. 29:13 seriously; "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Let's read through our passage in Col. 3 (1-4);

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

We will never live in the reality of 'that which is above' as long as we are focused on 'things on the earth'.

When the Lord moved from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, He moved from one race or species of humanity to a completely new creation humanity.

Here's how this author puts it:

"(Everything) is now transferred from the earth to heaven. In a very effective way, the Lord was saying: "Here we have no continuing city; we seek one to come. Our City is not of this earth at all..." and so He allowed the earthly Jerusalem to be a scattering place for the church, because now the Jerusalem is in heaven and not on earth. And perhaps they were inclined again to make it an earthly thing. And the Lord said: "No, not at all. My City, My Jerusalem, My Temple, is not down here, it's in Heaven; it's My Son!" Eventually, they came to see that."

We want a religion down here; something we can lock into that makes sense; with rules and activities we understand.

But the source of the Spirit's power, guidance and the impartation of spiritual life has moved from Jerusalem (from the temple, an earthly building) to the One who is seated at the right hand of God.

If you look at the book of Acts you can see that the work of the Holy Spirit was to take the life of Christ and mediate that life to His people on earth. He was continually raising their eyes to heaven – the source of their true spiritual lives - and at the same time, He was weening them from all that was of this earth, this world, including *any* religion in *any* form.

Whether individual believers or local assemblies, all of their power and guidance came from the throne of heaven, not from denominations and traditions of men.

They were in this world, but were not of it. Their home and their spiritual lives were above, where Christ is;

(Eph. 2:4-6). "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus"

It's where we are and it's where we are meant to live. Everything else is limited and ultimately, it's spiritual defeat.

Laodiceans aren't interested in heaven; overcomers are *only* interested in heaven.

Remember, Col. 3:3; "For you died, and your life is hidden (secured) with Christ in God."

There is no spiritual life that is real and true that does not come from a living association with the throne of heaven.

One of the problems we face when we study spiritual things is what we see in 1 Cor. 2:10-14;

"10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might

know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (or understood)."

If we try to understand spiritual truth with natural intellect, it may or may not be doctrinally accurate, but it *will* be spiritually empty.

This whole conversation about "seeking those things which are above" and "drawing our lives from our union with Christ in heaven" just comes across as confusing or impractical.

Just as our spiritual life has to come from Christ, so does our spiritual understanding of the Bible – if it does not come to us by revelation, we will become bored with these things and move back into the intellectual basics of the Christian religion as our *modus operandi*.

Actually, this is the bottom-line explanation of the difference between soul and spirit; between Laodicea and Philadelphia, between Christianity and Christ; between Acts and American Christianity; and between reality and deception.

Revelation given to teachable and seeking hearts versus intellectual knowledge secured through diligent study by Christian elites.

Matt. 11:25; "At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

1 Cor. 4:7; "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

1 Cor. 8:1-2; ". . . we know that all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know."

Knowledge without life is natural, fleshly knowledge.

The knowledge that comes by revelation of the Spirit is spiritual and brings a deepening inner change to those who receive it. It leads to the formation of the character of Christ, which Paul characterizes as “love which edifies”.

To give you a concrete example of how this plays out in real life, let’s tie this into our time in history. Larry shared some passages with Doug and I recently that I want to share and talk about for a few minutes.

I’m going to read from Daniel 12:1-10

“1 At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.

2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

4 But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.

5 Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. 6 And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long shall the fulfillment of these things be?”

7 Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

8 Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?”

9 And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. 10 Many shall be purified, made white, and

refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”

Now before I comment on this, I need to also read 1 Thess. 5:5-8;

5 “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

There are pastors, seminary professors and a multitude of others in church leadership positions that could dissect these passages hermeneutically, thoroughly and accurately.

But when you ask whether they can identify the time in history these passages are talking about, all you get from them are things like:

“No man knows the day or the hour” or “Yeah, we might be getting closer, but we can’t know for sure” or “We don’t need to worry about times and seasons, we just need to be good Christians and everything will turn out fine.”

In other words, their natural ability and intellect is fully intact, but their spiritual comprehension and discernment is non-existent.

Like Sardis, they have a reputation that they are spiritually alive, but they are spiritually dead.

They can study the scriptures, but they can’t hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches in our generation.

Acts 13:26-27, “Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent.

27 For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor hear the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him.”

So, every Sabbath the Jews listened to the word of the prophets recorded in their scriptures – but they didn’t understand the implications of what they were hearing.

They were in tune with the academics of the Bible but out of sync with the Person the Bible was presenting to them.

John 5:39-40; “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

We’ve seen this blindness in our discussions about the overcomers.

We can give all our goods to feed the poor or give our body to be burned. We can have all knowledge and understand all mysteries, but if we don’t have the kind of relationship with Christ that allows for a present, real, and growing spiritual apprehension of His word and the implications of what we’re learning, we are not overcomers no matter what else we may have going for us.

What God told Daniel would be sealed until the time of the end, is now be *unsealed* at an incredible speed.

To the wise, the children of light, those who are awake, everything happening around us is making sense and the growing inner confidence of Christ being “at the door” is becoming so obvious that spiritual believers have a very difficult time understanding why everyone can’t see it.

The reason is simple.

The wicked (whether unbelievers or carnal Christians – because the flesh is the flesh), are not seeking those things which are above, but instead, are increasingly influenced by the values, voices and cultural spirit of this age – by things on the earth.

This may come as a surprise, but the Lord would prefer that you and I *not* believe what a teacher tells us, just because he told us.

The Lord called the Bereans “noble” because *before* they believed Paul, they did their own study to confirm what Paul said.

Your relationship with Holy Spirit has to be such that you can hear me or anyone tell you that the church age is nearly over and even though you remain skeptical (which is natural), you can get alone with the Lord and the scriptures and prayer and seek to know whether it’s true or whether it’s not true.

Then when know either way, you can move from there.

But to remain indefinitely uncertain about something as important as this, is to be vulnerable to the deception that characterizes this time in history.

It’s not the initial uncertainty about our time in history that divides between the Philadelphian and Laodicean believer; it’s the willingness to settle for uncertainty.

It’s apathy and indifference about something the Bible says is absolutely crucial.

“You can use the signs in the sky to predict the weather, but you have no idea where we are in proximity to the Lord’s coming!?”

Another example of spiritual discernment we should look at for a few minutes is in Heb. 12:13-14,

“Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”

We know we are not of this world, even though we are *in* the world. And it’s easy to apply that principle when it comes to what we normally think of in verses like “love not the things of the world. . .”.

But “the camp” Hebrews is talking about is not some dive bar on Skid Row, it’s a religious mindset. In Hebrews it was Christians sliding back into Judaism.

In our generation it would be any church or political or religious organization that has adopted the values of this world and is centered here – its goals are related to fixing a world Christ intends to destroy.

Things like saving America from the Marxists while ignoring the fact that America is under judgment, not because of the Marxists (they’re the *instrument* of judgement, not the reason), the reason is the spiritual condition of the Church.

The salt has lost its savor. So, now it's being trampled down under the feet of men.

Here are some comments by Sparks on this:

“You see the difference between a traditional system, whether it be Judaism or Christianity, and a living thing coming all the time in a living way out from the Christ Himself by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit Himself doing it. Well, this is going to cost something. See what it meant for these people. At the end of this letter to the Hebrews, you come on this: “Wherefore, Christ also... suffered outside the camp. Let us therefore go to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” The camp was Judaism, and He suffered outside the camp because He repudiated Judaism and stood for the realization of all God's thoughts as in Himself personally. He gathered up everything into His own person, “I am.” It is the Christ who is the full sum and embodiment of all God's thoughts and ways.

“What is the issue? If you are going to take this line you are going to repudiate organized Christianity, going to repudiate Christendom as a traditional system, you are going to repudiate that order of things which is made, and you are going to suffer reproach and be outside of the camp suffering His reproach. In other words, we are immediately going to come up against that force of antagonism to stop what has come in through the death and resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus, the heavenly thing. Is it not sad that these people met it through God's historic people, the people who claimed to have the oracles, to be the elect, to be the favored of the Lord? It is always like that. “A man's foes shall be those of his own household.” Do not narrow that down to the limits of a family where one is a Christian and all the rest are not. That is not the point at all. It is his own household, the Christian household. You will meet the antagonism to what has come in from heaven as a heavenly thing; you will meet the antagonism amongst those who are the traditional people of God in this dispensation. That is how it will be. That is going to be the cost of a walk in Life with the Lord and not with man, knowing the Lord for yourself.”

His last statement, “knowing the Lord for yourself” is the bottom line.

The Hebrews were specifically commanded in Heb. 10:25 to “not forsake the assembling of themselves together”.

For some Christians, they love hearing about “leaving the camp”, and not just because the camp is boring or annoying, but because they don’t want to really do anything for anyone in *any* church. They just want to judge the camp.

The only cure or protection for deception is the development of the kind of personal relationship with Christ that puts us in a place spiritually where we can “hear what the Spirit is saying” to us.

I’m rereading a book I read years ago but this time it’s actually starting to make sense. It was written by one of the founders of the Keswick Conference movement. The author is Evan Hopkins.

“Christ has brought freedom to us. Man’s understanding must have its proper environment. It must occupy its true sphere in order to be free. That sphere is truth. As originally created, the mind of man was free because he dwelt in the truth. Since the fall, however, everything has changed. His mind is in bondage through darkness, ignorance and error. Christ restores us to liberty by bringing us the truth. ‘You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free.’ (John 8:32.) It is like the morning dawn; the light breaks into our inner being and we become conscious that we have been brought into an illuminated atmosphere. We know that our mental being has found its true element.”

Paul’s desire to move us into that position by pointing us to the Throne in Col. 3 is meant to affect us in a couple of ways.

First, you can’t be looking at earth and heaven at the same time. We have to make a choice.

For example, when Abraham was promised that he would be the father of many nations, and as the years moved on and he wasn’t even the father of *one* nation, he made a vital transition in his mind that brought him into alignment with the Lord.

Listen to how the writer to the Hebrews captures what was really going on behind the scenes – it’s a perfect parallel to the “set your affections on things above” passage in Col. 3;

Heb. 11:8-12; “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a true home. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

These are the overcomers; the people the Lord is proud to call His sons and daughters.

Abraham moved from earth to heaven – from that which is anchored here to that which is eternal and centered in the councils of God, not man.

And second, Paul personally reflects this same mindset in 1 Cor. 15:19; “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

Paul lost everything here and counted it as refuse in order to gain everything in eternity. In the context of 1 Cor. 15, Paul is showing that if the resurrection of the saints is not going to happen, then everything he has gone through and has lost has been for nothing.

Those clinging to things here, will forfeit what could have been theirs in the life to come.

In his work on Colossians, F.F. Bruce explains it this way;

“Since his people share his risen life, their interests are now centered in Him; His interests, in fact, have become theirs. They must therefore pursue those things which belong to the heavenly realm where He reigns; their mind, their attitude, their ambition, their whole outlook must be characterized by their living bond with the ascended Christ. “

Moving from a religious or distant relationship with Christ to one that is personal and involves the loss of our lives for Him, is the single most important transition a Christian can make.

It's the one thing the enemy will do everything in his power to prevent.

The Lord Himself made this crystal clear in His appeals for discipleship in the gospels.

Luke 9:24; “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life *for My sake* will save it.”

As this author explains this;

“You are not going to get fullness of life by reaching out for personal blessing. Spiritual fulness comes along the line of letting personal interests and blessing go in the interest of the Lord, for the glory and satisfaction of the Lord, that He may have His inheritance in us, that we may be to Him a heritage.”

Most of us have spent the largest part of our Christian lives in some combination of being here for the Lord and being here for us.

We tend to look at churches and the events of life along the lines of how they will affect us – what we can get out of them.

But the relationship with the Lord that opens the door to real spiritual advance is the kind of relationship that moves us from “what's in this for me” to “how can my life be given over to what the Lord can gain?”

I don't remember the source, but years ago I read about a tombstone in Ireland that was placed over the graves of a group of Christian women, which said something like,

“These sisters gave their lives to defend the rights of Christ in His assembly.”

Christ is worthy of all praise, glory and honor. He is the rightful heir of the throne of creation.

When the desire to see the Lord receive His inheritance, the fruit of His sacrifice, is more important to us than anything else, especially ourselves, we will begin to live the life of a disciple of Christ.

Isa. 53:9-11; “9He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and to cause Him to suffer; and when His soul is made a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.11After the anguish of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied.”

The difference between people like these women from Ireland and most of us, is as simple as looking at the driving motive of our lives as Christians.

Why are we here; why do we do what we do? Is it for a movement or Christianity – is it for ourselves and whatever blessing we can receive?

Or is it for the glory and honor of Christ?

There is a new Adam, the Son of Man and Son of God, sitting on the throne of the universe – God's eternal purpose has been accomplished and finalized in Christ.

Old things have passed away; all things have become new.

I'm going to close with a description of this heavenly viewpoint I came across;

“Is it not clear that from God's standpoint, in God's mind, everything is intended to be related to heaven and governed from heaven? Heavenly fullness is His objective with His people: to make them a heavenly people.

And right at the end we see the New Jerusalem – not the old one, but the New Jerusalem – coming down from God out of heaven. It is something immense; twelve thousand furlongs in every direction (Revelation 21:16). There is great fullness here. All the nations are going to derive their resource from it. The fruit of its Tree of Life, the waters of its River of Life, are for all the nations. Its light is for all the nations. "The nations shall walk in the light thereof" (Rev. 21:24). This is the thing to which the Lord has been working all the time.

“He is working now in you and me. I sometimes think that we are two persons, one here and one in heaven. Naturally we are here, but there is something of ourselves being pulled up all the time, when the Lord is getting in us something more of heaven. Is not that perhaps what the Lord meant, when He referred to Himself as "the Son of man, who is in heaven" (John 3:13), even while He is on earth? There is an aspect of us that is growing toward heaven. Do not think of heaven as some remote planet. We are growing in that heavenly thought of things. Something of us is "going up." Do you say your situation is too difficult to bring heaven in? Well, there are difficult situations. Daniel's was a difficult situation – his three companions were in a difficult situation; but they brought heaven in. A grand phrase in the book of Daniel is – "the heavens do rule" (4:26). And they proved it. Headquarters is in heaven: not in Babylon, not in Rome, not in Jerusalem or anywhere else, but in heaven. The Lord help us to live up to and out from heaven's throne.”

After you have listened to the 12/10/20 study on Col. 3:1-4, take a minute to read through the quote below. It's a great summation of what we talked about last night.

The heavens do rule. (Daniel 4:26)

"There is a great need today that there should be the rule of the Heavens. But the Holy Spirit has got to do it, and we have got to come to recognize the fact that what we see in organized Christianity is not it. The spiritual people of God are more and more feeling separated from the old system of Christianity and churches and ecclesiastical systems. People are recognizing a deep dissatisfaction with what has held the ground so long, and there is a cry for spiritual reality. Many sermons are clever and full of mental ability,

but they are starvation to the spirit. There is all the activity, but it is not spiritual life, and I believe the Lord is going to show us the nature of the thing that is in the heavens. The thing that man has brought down on to the earth and taken up and perpetuated is only at best a poor imitation of things in the heavens, but in a very large realm it is a caricature of heavenly things.

"Man has taken hold of heavenly things and brought them down to earth and made them earthly things. That is where things all went wrong at the beginning. At first, things were of the Spirit. The people gathered in their homes or anywhere. It was not the place. It was not the ministry. It was the Lord, and they were circled around Him. But then the day came when they said, "We must have public buildings," and then the architecture became a factor, and so things developed, and they became something on the earth for men to take note of. They wanted man to be attracted, and that was the first step in one of the greatest perils that has overtaken the church. For prestige, recognition, the world to be attracted, there is the result that you get the mixed multitudes in the church. If you can attach some big names to it, you can attract the people, and one of the devil's greatest measures has been popularizing the church. The preeminent thing is lost, that the church and Christ is a mystery to the natural man and that it is no use to expect the natural man to appreciate it. The church is essentially a spiritual thing according to the mind of God. What really governs everything is God's conception of things, not ours, and if we are going on with the Lord there is going to be a whole system of change and we are going more and more to view things from the heavenly standpoint. You have got to get into the heavenly system to get heavenly results."