

SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE BECAUSE YOU BELONG TO CHRIST

In Colossians 2:12 Paul introduced the thought that in Baptism Christians are buried and raised with Christ. He repeats that thought in chapter 3 and uses it as the basic, motivating truth for all the following encouragements for Christian living. Believers have been raised with Christ. Their faith rests not on a dead and lifeless Saviour, but on a living Lord, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He now sits at God's right hand and rules as the exalted God-man over the uni-verse, filling all things with His power.

Christ's resurrection and exaltation are the guarantee of His lordship and of believers' forgiveness. But even more than that, it is something that brings about a spiritual resurrection in believers' hearts. When the Holy Spirit brings people to faith, He joins them to Christ and makes them personal sharers in Christ's death and resurrection. God regards Christ's death as if it were the individual believer's death and credits it to each believer. God raises each believer from spiritual death to spiritual life, setting him free from the power of sin and bestowing peace, joy, and forgiveness on him in Christ.

Believers have been made personal sharers in the blessings earned by Christ, and now they are spiritually alive and joined to Christ. This ought to motivate them to live a special kind of life; a life lived in and for Christ. Those who are raised with Christ should be so transformed and changed inwardly that they will set their hearts on things above. Things above are heavenly things, spiritual treasures, and the blessings that the risen and ascended Christ has won for sinners and which He graciously bestows on those who come to Him. Those treasures include forgiveness, spiritual knowledge, faith, and all the fruits that faith produces in a Christian's life, beginning with love. Such treasures, and not the temporary treasures of the world, are now to be the real concerns of believers raised with Christ. Christians' goals, values, and decisions ought to reflect a conscious heavenly-mindedness.

That does not mean that Christians will forget about their duties in this life or fail to fulfil the earthly tasks the Lord has assigned to them. Nor does it mean that they will withdraw from the earthly society in which the Lord has placed them. It does mean that, as they live their day-to-day lives in the world, they will always take into account that their real citizenship is in heaven. They will never lose sight of the truth that nothing on earth is a lasting treasure and that lasting values can be found only in Christ.

Many of the Christians to whom Paul originally wrote this letter had been won for Christianity from the heathen world. There were temptations all around them to turn their backs on their Christian values and their Christian way of life and return to the kind of living that satisfied their sinful desires. But Paul reminds us that all who truly understand what Christ has done for them and know the meaning of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension will not be able to centre their lives again on the useless, changeable, material things and the sinful way of living that others are so concerned about. Believers will centre their lives on their risen and ascended Lord. Since Christ has ascended and sits at God's right hand as the ruler of the uni-verse, believers can set their hearts on heavenly treasures. They can have the absolute confidence that their exalted Saviour will pour down on them the gifts and blessings they need to build their lives on Him.

When the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Christ, they die to their sinful selves and their old, earthly way of living. Their guilt-laden natures are buried with Christ. Their status is changed from objects of condemnation to members of God's family of believers, and they enter upon a whole new way of life in Christ. During this present life, that new life is hidden with Christ in God. The inner nature of that life is not something that can be seen. It is a spiritual thing. Already in this life, believers experience the benefits of peace with God and the blessings of His forgiveness in their hearts, and their new lives in Christ are reflected in their outward actions.

To the world, that does not seem like much. Unbelievers may laugh and call believers foolish for adopting a lifestyle that rejects the world's standards and values and claims an invisible connection

with a divine Lord. Believers experience many of the same physical troubles that unbelievers experience in the world. But when the ascended Lord returns again as judge of all the world, what is now hidden from the world will be made gloriously visible. The glory of the inner relationship believers enjoy with the Saviour will be revealed, and they will be displayed in glory with Him, a glory they will enjoy perfectly and without interruption for all eternity.

As Christians, we live to Christ, with our hearts set on things above, and we die to sin. We put off our old, inherited, sinful nature and put on the new nature that is daily renewed in spiritual knowledge and the image of God. May our lives be constantly nourished by the gospel and marked by a continual growing in faith. Then our conscious, concerned, and continuous living for Christ and dying to sin will show that we belong to Christ!