

Colossians 3:1-4. We've seen that mysticism, asceticism, and legalism can't make someone spiritual. Being dead in sin, new life in Christ is the solution. He's the starting point for all spiritual growth.

Paul told the Colossians that since they're already alive with Christ they should seek the things above. Let's look at why he said that and what it means...

Jesus' ministry was nothing short of extraordinary. Crowds had never heard someone speak with the authority He wielded. They had never seen the lame walk or the blind see, nor had they ever seen a man raised from the dead. People followed Jesus all over the countryside, often for no other reason than seeing another miracle (Lk 7:31-32).

After the Resurrection and Jesus' ascension to Heaven, the church was formed. A small group of believers met in Jerusalem, and in their midst, the extraordinary happened. The apostles, for instance, healed countless people of their infirmities (Acts 5:12). As with Jesus, word spread and the crowds grew to see or to experience a miracle. Some followed the apostles for no other reason than this (Acts 8:9-24).

We're naturally drawn to extraordinary experiences, and that isn't necessarily bad. It's just worth noting that the focus of Jesus and His apostles wasn't here. The main attraction they wanted all to gather around when they came to a town or a village was something quite ordinary. The big event was supposed to be their teaching. Miracles illustrated what they taught or affirmed their message was from God.

While experiencing some amazing things, the early church was devoted to "the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). They were devoted to ordinary things—reading and studying Scripture, fellowship with one another, prayer. Practice these, emphasize them in your life, and guess what? You'll change. Christians don't grow by extraordinary, inexplicable experiences but by simple, ordinary means.

Believers in Colossae had been growing on God's Word, but would this continue? We read in Colossians 2 about spiritual guides in the area who boasted of their extraordinary experiences. These leaders seemed so close to the divine, so very spiritual, and yet, they weren't. They offered bits of mysticism, legalism, and asceticism to get closer to God. If you want to grow closer to God, you need Christ. Having Him, fix your mind upon on things above, and seek after those things day by day (Col 3:1-4).

ALIVE WITH CHRIST

What does true spirituality look like? We've seen what it isn't in the second chapter of Colossians. Spiritual guides in the region said you needed to live a strict lifestyle. Some tied it to following the Old Testament Law, while others equated spirituality with asceticism. You can't eat *this*, don't touch *these*, and avoid drinking *that*. Rules, rules, and more rules to attain some sort of mystic perfection or to appease a host of gods and intermediaries.

And it was all very compelling. These religious leaders seemed spiritual, and if anyone doubted, they could speak at length of the visions and dreams they'd received. Paul found something similar in Corinth—spiritual guides who had heard of the apostles, but claimed they were "super-apostles" (2 Cor 11:5). Leaders around Colossae played the same game, too. What did Paul think of it? He said these men weren't paragons of spirituality, but "puffed up without reason" (v. 2:18). They made a good religious show, but it wasn't connected in any way to Christ (v. 2:23).

So, what is true spirituality? Becoming like Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean following Jesus as a good moral example. Religious guides in Colossae said you had to keep parts of the Old Testament Law. That would've been moral, but morality isn't spirituality. Morality is good, but it can't bridge the infinite chasm between holy God and sinful man. There's no bridge, no reconciliation with God, no fellowship with Him apart from Christ. Apart from Christ, there is religion but there is no spirituality. Why? Because apart from Christ you're still dead in your sins (Eph 2:1-11).

"JESUS DIDN'T COME INTO THE WORLD TO MAKE BAD PEOPLE GOOD. HE CAME INTO THIS WORLD TO MAKE DEAD PEOPLE LIVE. HE CAME SO THAT THOSE WHO ARE DEAD TO GOD CAN BECOME ALIVE TO GOD."

~ RAVI ZACHARIAS.

As we read this letter to the Colossians, we're reminded that true spirituality has a starting point—Jesus Christ. The Colossians had been "raised with Christ" (v. 3:1). Having been united with God Himself, you don't need to abstain from select foods, have a mystical experience, or keep the Law of Moses to become spiritual. Through Christ, you've been raised to new life. Instead of seeking to become spiritual, realize that in Christ you already are.

True Spirituality

Recall the Pharisees. On one occasion, Jesus said they would “tithe the mint and dill and cumin” (Matt 23:23). How did they tithe that? In the case of dill, they counted each seed down to the last to ensure God got His part. Very meticulous, though misguided, and it looks a bit like the religion of the spiritual guides in Colossae. They probably didn’t divide up seeds, but they were no less legalistic.

Colossians 3:1-2—“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 on earth.”

Paul writes that because of a believer’s union or fellowship with Christ they should “seek the things that are above.” As opposed to counting seeds, “set your minds on things that are above.” Legalism, mysticism, and asceticism as practiced in ancient Colossae looked impressive, but it didn’t bring the worshipper closer to God. It was devout religious activity, but it consumed the worshipper with “things on earth.”

FUTURE GLORY

So, how do we deal with sin in our lives? There are some who say that once you’re saved by Christ, you don’t sin—you’re spiritually alive, filled with the Holy Spirit, and now sinless. Well, most of us understand that’s just not reality. We sin in our thoughts, actions, and words and can relate to Paul who said, “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:15). I want to please God, but I offend Him repeatedly. The normal Christian experience involves an internal struggle.

We would like to believe we shouldn’t struggle, that our new life in Christ should be easier, that we should be further along than we are. Spiritual guides in Colossae tried to impress the church in this way. They seemed to be so much further along, closer to God, living on a higher plane. Did these men have something the church didn’t? Were they already living in glory? Paul said that’s just not the case. The Christian life is a marathon, and you don’t arrive until the Lord returns or takes you home.

Colossians 3:4—“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Believers have been united to Christ through faith and raised with Him to new life. They’ve been “hidden with Christ in God,” held fast forever in an unbreakable union (Col 3:3). We believe this at

present by faith, but one day that faith will be sight. One day the Christian’s struggle with sin and all that’s broken about this world will cease. God will dwell with His people, and His people will be like Him in glory (1 Jn 3:2; Rev 21:1-4).

Paul told the Romans that “we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom 8:25). James said to “be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord” (Jas 5:7). Peter encouraged his readers to live holy lives “waiting for the new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). Waiting is never exciting, but the Christian life is characterized by a long wait for future glory. But with a future so bright, may the struggles of today increase your longing for the joys of tomorrow.

A PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

“Now, don’t be so heavenly minded that you’re of no earthly good.” It sounds like wise counsel, but this letter to the Colossians says the opposite—*Be heavenly minded!* A right view of “things that are above” should impact how we live here on earth below.

“IF YOU READ HISTORY YOU WILL FIND THAT THE CHRISTIANS WHO DID MOST FOR THE PRESENT WORLD WERE THOSE WHO THOUGHT MOST OF THE NEXT”
~ C.S. LEWIS.

The legalist, mystic, or ascetic each try in different ways to attain something unattainable. The legalist follows a religious code to earn God’s favor, the mystic believes he’s favored due to the things he’s seen or heard. The ascetic says he’s right with God because, well, look at all he’s sacrificed. Each of these systems consumes a person with his performance or experience: *I need to do better... I want another vision... I should give up more!* Love for God or for others isn’t what legalism, mysticism, or asceticism is able to produce.

Paul encouraged the Colossians that in Christ is “the whole fullness of deity... and you have been filled in Him” (Col 2:9-10). By God’s grace, His people have something unattainable. They’ve been united to and made complete in Christ. As a result, they should grow in their love for Him and their love for others. Growth in holiness and good works are products of setting your mind on things above.

The remainder of Colossians 3 will show how to grow in practical holiness. It also shows us what a heavenly-minded believer looks like at work and at home.