



Growth Sheet

Raised with Christ

Colossians 3:1-4

In the Apostle Paul's day, as in our own, many people believed that spiritual wholeness could be found in ecstatic experiences, religious rituals, or rule-keeping (see Colossians 2:16-23). In his letter to the Colossians, as we have been learning, Paul pushes back against such ideas. Genuine spiritual maturity, he insists, cannot come by working *toward* a life one does not have; rather, it comes by working *from* a life one has been given.

This is why, as he nears the end of his letter, Paul gives instructions on how the believers in Colossae should live out this life in Christ. "If then you have been raised with Christ," he writes, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). In these verses (3:1-4), Paul explains what this life *is*, what it means for *now*, and what it means for the *time to come*—in other words, (1) the *fact* of life in Christ (3:1, 3), (2) the *focus* of life in Christ (3:1-2), and (3) the *future* of life in Christ (3:4).

1. The fact of life in Christ (3:1, 3).

When a person believes in Jesus, a radical but invisible change takes place: that person has, in a sense, died and been raised to a new sort of life. This happens because, from God's perspective, one who believes in Jesus becomes so closely identified with him that what was true of Jesus—in that he died for sin and rose from the dead in victory over sin—becomes true of the believer as well (see Romans 6:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Yet because this change is invisible for now, we easily ignore or forget it. And because we easily ignore or forget, we easily fail to benefit from it—just as someone might be absent-mindedly looking for his wallet when he actually has it in his back pocket.

So Paul wants to bring the Colossians' life with Christ to the front and center of their attention as an objective *fact*. The fact that they have been raised with Christ, then, becomes the spring of their radically new way of living. All the good actions that believers should do flow from the fact that they have been raised with Christ; or, to put it succinctly, *acts flow from facts*.

2. The focus of life in Christ (3:1, 2).

This new life in Christ means that believers must have a particular *focus*—"things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (3:1, 2). Although the word "heart" is not present in this passage, the Biblical concept of the heart is here. The heart is a metaphor for that part of you that desires deeply, that turns dreams into goals and goals into actions.

So when Paul tells his readers to "seek" and "set your minds on things above, where Christ is," he is telling them that their hearts must be shaped by the priorities, values, and goals that Christ

demonstrated. In a world in which individuals seek power through self-interest, believers should fix their minds on the one who is really seated on the throne of the universe—Jesus Christ, who, possessing all power *gave* himself sacrificially for others. In a world that is grieved by sickness and death, believers should fix their minds on the one who died to eventually end all sickness and death. By focusing on Jesus' self-giving love, believers will find their own disordered loves straightened out. They will, as Jesus taught, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

3. The future of life in Christ (3:4).

Finally, Paul explains what life in Christ means for a time to come: “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (3:4). In the verse prior, Paul had told the Colossians that their “life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3). This means not only that their life is secure (it is “with Christ in God”), but that their new nature is not yet revealed. In other words, what they are from *God's* divine perspective has yet to be brought into the blazing view. The Apostle John teaches the same thing in his first letter: “We are God's children now,” he writes, “and what we will be has not yet appeared” (1 John 3:2). For now, we still struggle with sin. Our bodies will one day succumb to death, if Christ does not return first. But one day we will “appear with him in glory.” In other words, we will be the perfect humans God had intended us to be from the very beginning—conformed to the image of his Son (see Romans 8:28-29).

Discussion and Application

1. Have you ever forgotten that you owned something and wasted money buying a duplicate? Or thought you had lost something valuable when in fact you had it with you all along? The fact that we have been raised with Christ is one of the most valuable convictions a Christian can have. Why is it easy to forget or ignore this?
2. The above explanation of the passage states that “acts flow from facts.” Note throughout Colossians chapters 3 and 4 the various “facts” Paul teaches about believers and then the “acts” that God expects of them (see 3:9, 12, 13, 15, 4:1).
3. Someone has said that what the heart finds most lovable, the mind finds most believable and the will finds most doable. What are some ways we can tell what we have set our hearts on?
4. Suppose you were to spend every day next week consistently focusing on Christ's values perspectives, and priorities as you go about your normal work. Discuss how such a focus would impact decisions you make, how you treat the people around you, or what you would be hoping for the following week.
5. The promise that “we will appear with him in glory” is not only personally encouraging, but it should affect how we regard other believers. How should the conviction that God will one day bring our fellow believers to glory affect the way we think about, talk about, and treat them?