

The Risen Life

Colossians 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.

Dolphins really live in two worlds. While they swim, hunt and live in the ocean, like fish, they do not have gills to get oxygen out of the water. They are air-breathing creatures. So, dolphins must always surface to expel the air they have used and to take another breath. If you were to prevent a dolphin from coming to the surface, it would drown. Dolphins live in the sea, but their life depends on the air above the sea.

Sharks, on the other hand, are fish that get their air from the water below. They do not need to surface. They are entirely dependent on the world of the sea.

If dolphins act like sharks, they will die. Their internal nature is such that they must get their air from above the water.

Before someone is a Christian, he is like a true fish of the sea. As the sea is completely home to a fish; so this world with its ambitions, goals, desires and priorities are those of unbelievers. They depend on this world – they breathe it.

But when someone is saved, God miraculously transforms that person internally. This person now becomes dead to this world and its sin, and alive to God. Because this is true of them, they can no longer live as they used to. Like a dolphin still in the water, they are now in the world, but they are dependent on something above the world. The dolphin is still in the sea, but the dolphin must keep surfacing. So a Christian is in the world, but he or she can no longer take the world into him or her. Christians must keep surfacing, so to speak, seeking what is above, thinking on what is above – which in our case is not air, but the Person of Jesus Christ and His truth.

If Christians do not surface continually and often, they will spiritually waste away. If a Christian does not act according to his nature, he will be unhappy, unhealthy, and most of all, a reproach to God's name.

In this Scripture, Paul wants believers to realise they are spiritual dolphins. You are not a shark who can breathe this world in. You are a heaven-breathing human, who has been fundamentally transformed inwardly. You must not act contrary to your nature.

This is the approach the Bible takes again and again. We see it in Romans 6, in Ephesians, in Galatians 2:20 – first the position, then the practice; first your nature in Christ, then your behaviour.

Christianity is not about imposing morality from the outside in. Christianity is about an invisible internal miracle becoming external and visible in practice. Christianity is always inside out – becoming what you are; acting upon what has really happened.

False religion, false Christianity ignores the act of regeneration, and claims that man can turn over a new leaf and do various moral acts himself. The Bible teaches that for a man to keep the Ten Commandments, for a man to keep the Sermon on the Mount, for a man to keep the Great Commandment – he must be given a new heart. He must be connected to a power and a holiness which is not native to him.

We see two things then in this passage – your position in Christ, and your resulting practice. First, what happened; second, what you must do.

1. Your Raised Position

Sometimes chapter divisions are unhelpful. Chapter divisions are not inspired. They are just helps. What appears as chapter 3:1 should be taken as one thought with chapter 2:20. In 2:20 we read, “*if you died with Christ*”, and now in chapter 3:1 we read ‘*if then you were raised with Christ*’. In each case the word ‘*if*’ could probably be better rendered ‘*since*’. This is not a statement of hypothetical situation; it is a statement of a fulfilled condition. Since this is true of you, act accordingly.

There are actually three things which are true of you as a believer. Let's take them chronologically. Firstly, *you died with Christ*. We saw that in 2:20, and we see it in 3:3 - “*For you died.*” In what sense did you die? When Jesus died on the cross, He was your substitute. That means you died with Him.

You died to the *penalty* of sin. The wages of sin is death, and in Christ, you paid that. He was your substitute, so you do not have to pay it again. Jesus died your death.

You died to the *power* of sin. Romans 6:6-7 ‘*knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.*’

Before you come to Christ, you and sin are like two gears; if the one moves then the other moves. If sin desired something, you desired it. There was no difference. There was no power to say no to self. But Christ's death means that you are no longer in union with sin. You can go up to sin, you can deliberately engage yourself in it, but it no longer drives you. Sin's union with you is no longer true. You have a new union.

The difference between a fraudster and a wealthy man is not the size of the cheques they write; it is what they have to back their cheques up. The fraudster has nothing, the wealthy man has real money. The person trying to change themselves is a fraudster, trying to make big changes externally; but internally, nothing has happened. They have nothing to back up what they are seeking to do. Christians, have the power of Calvary, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ behind them.

You died to this *world* –

Galatians 6:14 ‘*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*’

God has disconnected you from the life support system of this world. He pulled out the drip, switched off the ventilator, and unplugged the heart-lung machine of this world system. As such you cannot be plugged back into it. You died to it.

There were two sisters who enjoyed attending dances and wild parties. Then they were both converted and found new life in Christ. They received an invitation to a party, and they sent their response in these words, “We regret that we cannot attend because we recently died”.

Secondly, *you rose with Christ* -

Romans 6:4 ‘*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*’

As we said, the words ‘*if you have been raised*’ are better understood ‘*since you have been raised*’. Christ conquered death.

Imagine having a virus in your body that can only be killed with a 50 000 volt shock. If you were to hold the ends of the live wires, you would be fried. But Jesus is the one who can, so to speak, take a 50 000 volt shock; die, and then come back to life. He can take the death of the cross, endure the wrath of God the Father, and rise again, vindicated and spotless.

So it is as if Jesus, with you on his back, holds the wires, and the shock goes through you and Him, and you both die. But because you are so connected to Him, if He rises, so do you. And when Jesus rose, He was forever dead to sin. And so are you.

Romans 6:8-10 *'Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.'*

Jesus rose. And because you rose with Him, this passage tells us *'Christ is your life'*. He isn't being poetic. He is saying 'the life you now have is not your old person at all. It is the life of Christ resident in you.'

Galatians 2:20 *'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.'*

Does that mean you no longer have a personality? No, you know that you are still an individual. It means your spiritual life is not the dead, hard heart turned away from God. You have a new heart, a heart pointed towards Christ. A heart which wants to please Him, wants to follow Him.

Someone has said, *'life is what you are alive to.'* For Paul it was clear - *'For me to live is Christ'*.

In other words, you have been changed from within, from a spiritual shark to a spiritual dolphin. Your heart will seek the air above. Your heart now wants to dwell where Christ dwells. Your desires are now pointed towards pleasing Him. His life is your life. Therefore you cannot go on living as if it is your life, as if it is all about you.

In fact, the Bible tells us your life is *hidden* in Him - *with Christ in God*.

That means that when God looks at you, He looks at you in Christ. You and Christ, so connected that Christ's righteousness has become yours; Christ's merit before the Father has become yours. You are in Christ, and Christ is in the Father. Therefore you are loved, secure, accepted and complete in Him.

But I believe the word *'hidden'* also refers to something which leads us to the third way we are united with Christ. Just as a caterpillar is not recognised as a butterfly, until its metamorphosis; so a believer's true status is not seen until the return of Christ.

Not only did you die with Him, not only did you rise with Him, but when He returns, *you will appear with Him*.

The day of Christ's glorious appearing, will be the day of unveiling the glory veiled behind these decaying bodies.

1 John 2:28 - 3:2 *'And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. ²⁹ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. 1 John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be,*

but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

Like the rising sun causes flowers to open, the appearance of Christ will cause believers to be resurrected.

Philippians 3:20-21 ... *we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*

Our true nature as sons of God will be seen. Why should I seek my own glory from this dying, decaying world, when the Bible promises that I will reflect Jesus in all His glory at His appearance?

Romans 8:19 *'For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.'*

Matthew 13:43 *'Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!'*

One of the errors of the modern Gospel is to make out that Jesus died only for you and rose again, and now delivers a gift of salvation to you. It fails to make clear that Jesus not only died for you, but if you repent and receive Him, then you die with Him. His death is yours, His life becomes yours; His future is yours.

Baptism pictures this. A baptism service portrays these glorious truths – *died with Christ*. Everything that goes under the water died with Jesus. *Raised* - everything that comes out of the water belongs to Jesus.

2. The Resulting Practice

Now we come to the practice. Since this is true of you, since you have died with Christ, been raised with Christ and will appear with Christ, how should you act?

Verse 1 says *seek those things which are above*. Verse 2 says, *set your mind on things above*.

'Above' is defined for us as where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father. This is opposed to the earth, as seen in verse 5. *Above* means eternal things, permanent things. It means that which has to do with Christ, His kingdom, His glory, His perfections.

Earth, on the other hand, stands for what is related to the old sinful life. It is man-centred, temporary, perishing.

Now the Bible is not saying that Christians must be disconnected from this life. That would be the error of asceticism that Paul just dealt with. Nor does he mean we are to think too literally about the throne of God, and think about that location. He means make the life in Christ your goal.

He means, as a spiritual dolphin, seek the air above.

Let your priorities be above.

Let your ambitions be from above.

Let your goals be from above.

Let your motives be from above.

By contrast, consider the average advertisement, the average TV show, the average unsaved person – what priorities do they have? What ambitions? What goals? What motives? What are they seeking? They are seeking power, pleasure, advancement, fame, luxury, comfort, amusement, ease. What they seek all relates to this world, this life. It takes just one strong earthquake, to obliterate

everything that someone living in this world is seeking.

In fact, the writer of Hebrews tells us just that.

Hebrews 12:25-29 *See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, ²⁶ whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." ²⁷ Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.*

If what you are seeking in life can be shaken, then you are not seeking what is *above*. If what you are seeking would remain after God has shaken the world, then you are seeking the permanent, eternal things.

Matthew 6:33 *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Psalms 73:25 *Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*

Pilgrim's Progress is all about someone who keeps his eyes on the heavenly city. His goal is not here on earth, though he must travel through it, and be used by God in it. A pilgrim is seeking another country, another city.

If that is to be the goal of your life, how do you do that? Verse 2 tells us – *set your mind on things above*. To have this kind of goal, motivation, ambition, you must consciously think about it.

Proverbs 23:7 *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.*

Romans 8:5-6 *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

Get your attitudes from above. Get your understanding from above. Get your ideas from above. Get your attitudes from above.

A dolphin still has to live in the sea, but it must breathe air, not water. So you must breathe thoughts from above, not from the world. Now because you live in this world, it is hard not to breathe in this world. This world's ideas come in to us from our own families, from school, from visits to the mall, from TV and movies, from friends, from work, from magazines, books, the Internet. Continual thought food. Some of it is fine and helpful, but a lot of it is not. So Christians, in order to live the risen life, must fill their minds with truth from above.

Take in the Word of God. Take every opportunity you have to hear the Word of God. Be discipled by someone else in the Word of God. Sing the Word of God. Pray inwardly and meditate on the Word of God. Read what other sound Christians have said about the Word of God. Surround yourself with believers who love and cherish the Word of God.

This is how we are to live in this world. A dolphin actually takes a breath, and then is able to swim for several minutes underwater; and then it comes up again. So we must continually come up to the Word of God, fill our minds with it, and then submerge back into the world to be the light of the world. But we do not fill ourselves with the world. We are in it, and must interact with it and make Christ known in it, but our air is above.

The Scottish preacher John McNeill used to speak about an eagle that had been caught as an eaglet. The man who'd caught it made sure it couldn't fly through a restraint, and then he allowed it to roam in the farmyard with the other chickens. Before long, it was pecking the ground like the other chickens.

A shepherd came to visit, who was used to seeing soaring eagles, and he commented on the shame of keeping such a bird on a restraint. The farmer agreed, and the restraint was cut. Sadly, the eagle kept pecking and scratching like a chicken.

One day the farmer was visited by a shepherd who came down from the mountains where the eagles lived. Seeing the eagle, the shepherd said to the farmer, "What a shame to keep that bird hobbled here in your barnyard! Why don't you let it go?" The farmer agreed, so they cut off the restraint. But the eagle continued to wander around, scratching and pecking as before. The shepherd picked it up and set it on a high stone wall. Once it saw the sun and the glorious blue sky, for the first time it spread its wings and leapt off, soaring into the air.

I wonder how many eagles who are reading this message continue to peck at the ambitions and goals and desires of this world. I wonder how many eagles are eating the specks of the world's thoughts, and have not realised they have died to this, have risen with Christ, and they must simply act upon that by faith. Spread your wings, reckon it to be true.

I wonder how many dolphins there are, who are nearly fainting because they do not surface to breathe the thinking from above.

If you are an unbeliever, you can do nothing but act like an unbeliever. If you are a believer though, you have a choice. You can act in a similar way to unbelievers. Or you can become what you are.

When people testify that they are in Christ by the symbol of baptism, they are saying they have died to sin and risen to Christ, and they are going to seek the things which are above - they are going to set their minds on things that are above.