

# Abiding Fruit



*John 15:16*

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## Christ Our Life Colossians 3:4

In one of the most powerful passages in all of Scripture on the mortification of sin, we discover the secret to the believer's fight with sin and mastery over sin. It is simply that we have died and our life is now hidden with Christ in God (vs. 3) and when Jesus appears, who is *our life*, then, we also will appear with him in glory (vs. 4). Verse 4 is set among many important truths that Paul weaves in Colossians 3:1 – 17. The implication of setting our minds on heavenly things promotes the defeat of setting our minds on earthly things (vs. 2). You cannot have both – it is either one or the other. There is a theological reality in that we are raised with Christ presently (vs. 1), which is designed to aid us in practicing the reality of dying to sin presently.

The privilege accorded to us in saving relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ is that because we have been raised with Him (since He has been raised), we are able to seek the things above where Christ is seated in exaltation at the right hand of God (vs. 1). The ability to seek heavenly things is ours by virtue of our union with Christ ratified in His exaltation to glory. The hope of the believer is that when Jesus appears (vs. 4), we will also appear with Him in glory. Christ is in glory, and we too have the promise of sharing in His glory. The journey to glory is handled by applying and realizing the theological and practical benefits that are ours.

The focus on heavenly realities (vs. 1- 4), enables us to put to death (mortify) earthly sinful practices (vs. 5 – 11). This is from a negative point of view. The positive side is found in verses 12 – 17 where we exchange the old for the virtues of Christ. The theme of Colossians 3:1 – 17 is achieved in these three ways: we recognize the spiritual reality that is ours by virtue of the finished work of Christ; we then, in view of that, put off the old way of life by dying to all that is sinful in us, (we are to die practically because we already have died with Christ positionally – Rom. 6:1 - 10); and, we then put on the new man which exhibits these glorious virtues wrapped up in Christ.

Let us consider then, first of all, the theological truths. Unless we grasp these we will flounder in practically applying them. Paul's remarks in verse 1, do not suggest that this is a condition (being raised with Christ) that may or may not be true. It is true and since it is true, we can live in a certain way. The main truth is that we are raised with Christ. This means then, that we are to live our lives in the heavenly reality on earth. What is true of us in glory with Christ enables us to be heavenly minded on earth.

To be heavenly minded according to the Bible is the greatest incentive to earthly usefulness (contrary to the little ditty – so heavenly minded, but of no earthly use). Since we are where Christ is (vs. 1) we are to "*set our minds*" (vs. 2), on heavenly things (things above). This means we are to strive earnestly in seeking the things above. We are to act decisively in fixing our hearts and minds on things above. This is not as easy as it may sound, for the simple reason that there are a multitude of distractions all around us (earthly things), not least of which is the flesh (see vs. 5 – 11). Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:18 that we must "*not look to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*"

The things we see (earthly things) are temporal. They are not eternal therefore, why focus on them? The unseen things (heavenly things) are eternal and that is where our focus should be, because that is where Christ is.

We find then that we must strive earnestly in verse 1, and we must concentrate particularly (or focus) in verse 2. Striving after and focusing on the things that are above is the key to overcoming sin. There is no warfare that is easy. It takes active work to strive and contend. It takes discipline to focus and concentrate on the war at hand. The believer must realize that we are at war. It is not a game. Sometimes we treat sin as a game. We play and dally with sin. Sin is not a game – it is a deadly foe that continually strikes at us. It is not easy to fight (since when was any fight easy), but it is possible to fight. This is what Paul wants us to understand. You can fight and win if you recognize the truths of these verses.

Our death with Christ and our life hidden in Christ now is the promise guaranteeing our appearing with Christ in glory when He appears. This fight that we are engaged in is not a physical fight. It is a moral fight. Earthly things have twisted moral truth into an immoral lie. This immoral lie appeals to us because we still are in our fleshly bodies, and therefore Paul urges us in verse 5 to “*put to death*” those earthly things. What are these things? They are in verse 5: “*sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness which is idolatry.*” Paul always calls sin, sin. He does not downplay what it is. To downplay sin provides us with excuse for sin. We don’t realize the danger of sin because we view it less than it really is. Paul never does this. What Paul is saying to us is that we must call our sin for what it really is. Use the terms Paul uses. This is how we must confess sin to God. We must view and call sin exactly the same way God views it and calls it. This list of sins mirrors the great sins of the Old Testament condemned in the Ten Commandments. Sexual immorality and idolatry go together. God’s wrath (vs. 6) is coming (has already begun – present tense is used), on all who do these things. Paul recognizes that the Colossians used to live like this (vs. 7).

Paul urges the Colossians to put off (vs. 8) all these sins. He lists bad habits in verses 8 and 9 that are to be put away. Just as we change dirty clothes so we must put on the new clothes of righteousness (cf. vs. 10). The Bible often uses the idea of clothing to represent behavior (Rom. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:8; also Ps. 35:26). Christians are not to be filled with anger and rage. They are not to entertain malice towards others. They are to watch their mouths and not slander and use bad language, and they are not to lie to each other (vs. 8, 9). Our behavior is to match our position in Christ. The reason we do not have to commit the sins mentioned is because we have made the great exchange. We have put on the new man (vs. 10), and the new man is being renewed in the knowledge of God. We are being transformed and we are to be transformed (Rom. 12:1, 2). We are being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Our renewal expresses itself in the virtues found in verses 12 – 17. We must replace the old way of life with the new way of life, and we must do this every day. Our new life is one of practical benefit to others expressing itself in love (vs. 12 – 14). We must let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (vs. 15) and we must be thankful people. We must let the Word of Christ (vs. 16) dwell in us richly (by study, by meditation, by memorization). This will be expressed in a rejoicing kind of life – singing with thankfulness (psalms, hymns and spiritual songs). It will be expressed in communication toward others (teaching and admonishing). Our earthly labor becomes an opportunity for worship and praise (vs. 17).

All of this is ours and can be ours, if we recognize that we have died with Christ (vs. 3). We have been raised with Christ (vs. 1), and Christ is our life (vs. 4). He has not left us to our own devices or limited us to our strength or abilities. We accomplish all these things through Him who is our life and our strength. We are hidden in Him safe from all alarms. Christ is our life living in us and through us and His appearance means our appearance with him in glory. What a Day is coming. Our life is coming - Christ Himself.