

Just like any plant must be firmly rooted in good soil, Christians must be firmly rooted in Christ in order to grow spiritually (Colossians 2:6-7), to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. By being rooted in Him, we can also bear fruit and withstand the alluring ways and wisdom of this world. Recall in Colossians 1-2 Paul described the supremacy of Jesus, which should lead us to solely rely on Him for salvation. But God's work in us is not only at the moment we were saved, but continues throughout our lives. So now in chapter 3 he begins to talk about Christian life (also described in 1:10), the process of transformation and renewal through the Spirit, God's word, and fellowship with others in Christ.

We see in 3:1-4 that we are rooted in our union with Christ, who continually nourishes our new life. Each of us is united with Christ, but we are also united with each other in Christ, as a community. We are saved by grace through faith, but this process of transformation is also by grace through faith, not by doing good works. We must not turn to legalism, mysticism, or asceticism to grow spiritually, but rather we must continually abide in Jesus. His work on the cross saves us and continues to sanctify us. Good works may be the fruit of this new life, but Jesus is the source of it.

The focus of today's passage is our union with Him in death and resurrection, in life, and in glory. This union isn't just an intellectual concept, rather it is central to our thoughts and choices. It covers the past, present, and future. In v. 1 Paul, as a matter of fact, states that in the past we were raised with Christ at conversion. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead made us born again into a new life in Him. Our response should be to set our hearts on things above. We cannot live for this world since we don't belong to this world. Our home is above, where Christ is. The word "set" means to keep seeking. It's an ongoing motivation to give the things above priority. We don't just wait for Christ to return and establish His kingdom. His kingdom has been spiritually established here already, though physically we are still in this world. So we must keep our eyes above, where Jesus is, seated at the right hand of God (a position of ultimate authority given by God, see Psalm 110), for we are united with Him there. Though physically we are in this world, we are spiritually in Christ.

In the present, we are hidden with Christ in God. Adam hid from God because of his sin, but we are hidden with Christ, who covers our sin so we can approach the Father. Being hidden means we are separate and protected from danger (see Psalm 27:4-5). We are separated and protected from the worldly influences. In response, we should set our minds on things above. The word “set” here refers to a mental disposition rather than seeking. Not only must we focus our eyes on Christ, but our minds must become like His. We must imitate the mind of Christ and let Him guide our thoughts by meditating on God’s revelation about Him in Scripture. It’s impossible to leave the world entirely, but we must walk with Jesus rather than in the ways of the world. And amidst our struggles with our sinful nature and with the world that tries to pull us away, we can only have victory if we keep abiding in Christ, who frees us from the world and from sin.

Finally, v. 4 discusses our future glory in Christ, which is the hope we have in Him. It says Christ is our life. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Life is defined by Him, and He gives substance and meaning to life. Apart from Christ there is no life, merely existence. With this understanding we must say as Paul did, that to live is Christ (Philippians 1:21). Paul says of himself that he is the least of the apostles and the worst of sinners, so we shouldn’t think living for Christ is only for the exceptional believer. And this life is with the hope of that which is stored up for us in heaven (Colossians 1:5), of future glory, the resurrection of our bodies at the end. This is made possible by our union with Christ. Our transformation is an ongoing process that ends with us being like Jesus (1 John 3:2).

We must be assured of this hope and remember that it’s all through God’s grace and love. His grace freed us from proudly striving for salvation through adherence to the Law. But we are also free from antinomianism, which says that we can walk our own way now that we are free from the Law. We are free from the Law, but also from the sin that through the Law produced death in us. Now we follow the law of love. We must love God and love each other as Christ loved us. Though it’s difficult, we must obey faithfully and joyfully, not out of obligation but rather because we are united with Christ, whom we strive to imitate. This unity inspires us to love and obey Him.