

# Practicing What You Believe

Our Sufficiency in Christ

By Steve Viars

Bible Text: Colossians 3:1-4

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- How many of us have heard the saying – “that person is so heavenly minded he’s no earthly good”...probably all of us right...
- in fact in my extensive research on this subject I even learned that the eminent theologian Johnny Cash has a song with that title...so surely that says something...
- ...so heavenly minded he’s no earthly good...
- well, what exactly does that mean?...I suppose it’s an individual who spends so much time praying or thinking about spiritual truth or biblical principles that he has no time for accomplishing what the Lord desires on earth...
- kind of like a monk or one of those guys who goes and sits on top of a flagpole and chants to heaven or something...
- well, let me ask you this...do you know anyone like that?...
- do you know anyone today who fits into this category – so heavenly minded he’s no earthly good...
- I don’t...I honestly can’t think of one person that I know on any level that deserves that label, or criticism, or whatever it is...
  
- let’s push it one step further...what about those who might fit in the reverse category...those who are so earthly minded that they are no heavenly good...like this guy -- **Psalm 10:4 - The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, “There is no God.”**
- there’s a person who’s so earthly minded he’s no heavenly good, right?...
- or this warning -- **1 John 2:15–17 - Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.**
- that’s a pretty clear warning isn’t it – about being so earthly minded that you’re no heavenly good...
  
- now let me ask you this – in those moments when you’re not perfectly balanced (you can decide if that’s once a month or once...a minute) – in those moments when you’re not perfectly balanced...
- do you tend to be a person who’s too heavenly minded...or not heavenly minded enough?...
- and how does that affect your ability to know God, and to love God, and to serve God...
  
- with that in mind, I’d like to invite you to open your Bible this am to Colossians chapter 3...page 158 of the back section of the Bible under the page in front of you...
- our church’s theme this year is **In Christ Alone**...and why is that?... because this the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the protestant reformation...and these words summarize the five solas of the reformation, that

salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone...

- in these first months of the year, we're doing a verse by verse study of the book of Colossians entitled **Our Sufficiency in Christ...**

- that's why everyone in our church family is going to try to read at least one book on the Protestant Reformation this year...because we don't want to squander any potential growth opportunities this important anniversary affords us...

- now, I know what some of you are thinking...but PV, I already finished that book...and now I'm planning on going to the beach in the next few weeks for spring break and I don't know what I'm going to read...

- friend...have no fear...I am going to offer a solution to that problem before this message is over...

- now, we're about to make a very important transition in our study...these chapter divisions in the Bible were added later – and they certainly help us find our way around God's Word...sometimes they are unfortunate because they break up important sentences or flows of thought...

- in this case, the break is right where we would expect it to be...because Paul is making a clear transition as he almost always does between doctrine and practice...between truth and practical application...that's why verse 1 starts with the word...**3:1 - therefore**

- In his commentary on Colossians, Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe said...**In the final two chapters of Colossians, Paul moved in the practical application of the doctrines he had been teaching. After all, it does little good if Christians declare and defend the truth, but fail to demonstrate it in their lives. There are some Christians who will defend the truth at the drop of a hat, but their personal lives deny the doctrines they profess to love. "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him" (Titus 1:16).**

**We must keep in mind that the pagan religions of Paul's day said little or nothing about personal morality. A worshipper could bow before an idol, put his offering on the altar and go back to live the same old life of sin. What a person believed had no direct relationship with how he behaved, and no one would condemn a person for his behavior.**

**But the Christian faith brought a whole new concept into pagan society: what we believe has a very definite connection with how we behave! After all, faith in Christ means being united to Christ; and if we share His life, we must follow His example. He cannot live in us by His Spirit and permit us to live in sin. Paul connected doctrine with duty in this section...(Bible Exposition Commentary, p. 133).**

- and I think all of us would say – and that's exactly what we want...so please listen carefully to this short passage of Scripture...[**read Colossians 3:1-4**]...

- we're talking this morning about **Practicing What You Believe**...and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 realities to help you live out your faith.**

- first of all,

### *1. Your Present Position*

- I recognize that a number of people who are worshipping with us these days are very new to studying the Word of God...

- and can I just say that if you fit into that category...we are so glad you're coming...that's a sign of church health and we always want to be sure that we are making biblical truth as understandable to as many people as possible...
- well, one of the first distinctions that has to be made about any Bible verse or principle in Scripture is – is this speaking about position, or practice?...
- or “who I am in Christ”...or “what I’m to become”...
- or more formally – is this a gospel indicative...or a gospel imperative?...
- so what's the difference?...
- a person becomes a Christian, or a follower of Christ...at a specific point in time...
- that's why God uses metaphors like birth and marriage to describe the process...
- events like that happen at specific points in time...
- so you recognize your sin and how that has separated you from a holy God...you come to an understanding that you cannot earn your way to heaven on your own merit...
- and then you repent...you turn around...and you place your faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ...you accept salvation as a free and complete gift of grace...
- **Ephesians 2:8–9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**
- and when that occurs, literally hundreds of things happen to you...related to your position before God...
- you're forgiven, you're adopted, you're justified, you're sealed with the Holy Spirit until the Day of promise...
- all of that is referring to the gospel indicatives...who you are in Christ...and often when the Bible speaks – it is referring to some aspect of your identity – your position...that is why the Scripture would even go so far to say of you that you are holy...you are a holy priesthood...a holy nation...you've been declared righteous...
- how could that be so based on the fact that we all know we still sin?...well, in those cases the Lord is talking about our position...he chooses to look at us now through the lens of the righteousness of His Son...
- but in plenty of other places...the Bible is talking about our practice...our lifestyle...the gospel imperatives...what we do because of who we are in Christ...in His strength...in His power...but still as our responsibility...which is why when you layer Ephesians 2:10 into the conversation – you say the balance... **Ephesians 2:8–10 - For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**
- here's the point – studying the Word of God will be very frustrating to you unless you regularly ask the question – is the Lord speaking here about my position, or my practice...what's He's done for me fully and completely in Christ, or what I'm to do in response to His grace...an indicative or an imperative?...but once you start thinking about Scripture in this way...a lot of things fall into place...
- now, in the verses we just read [as is often the case], you see an interchange...there are several key ideas about our position mixed together with other key ideas about our practice...because we're at a transition point in the book from one to the other...
- in fact – let's read the verses one more time – but please the appropriate phrase to the appropriate category...

- read **Colossians 3:1-4**

- it's pretty obvious when you look at it that way, isn't it?...
- so again...**3 realities to help you live out your faith.**
- the first one being...**I. Your Present Position**
- what's emphasized throughout the verses is how...**A. You're united with Christ.**
- how many times do you see that in these verses?...
  - **3:1 - ...raised up with Christ**
  - **3:1 - ...where Christ is**
  - **3:3 - ...hidden with Christ**
  - **3:4 – with Him in glory**

- that's part of what makes what we're talking about this morning so possible...how can you be appropriately heavenly minded?...by/through the power of your present position...look at the identity and location of the Person to whom you're united...

- Paul also says you're...

**B. Raised with Him.**

- **Colossians 3:1 - Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ...**

- now, we should probably say something about that word "if" ...
- Greek grammarians refer to that as a "first class condition" (I'm sure that warms your heart)...but in English it could literally be translated since...and that's certainly the sense of it here...
- the word literally means "co-resurrected..."
- John MacArthur said it like this – **Paradoxically, before Christians can reach the world, they must first leave it (John MacArthur, Colossians, p. 125).**
- and when you tie that back to what Pastors Aucoin and Green taught us about last week – invariably false teachers are going to try to ground your spirituality in some practice on earth – **Colossians 2:21 - Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!**
- all sorts of man-made rules, or asceticism, or worship of angels...or whatever...and he says...
- **Colossians 2:23 - These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.**
- you have something far better than that – your union with Christ in His resurrection...
- he picks that up again in verse 3 when he says you've also...

**C. Died with Him.**

- **Colossians 3:3 - For you have died...**

- now, you might say – I would have thought that would have been stated in reverse order...and that's true...but for whatever reason...Paul stated it in the order he did without explaining why...
- but we know this...the moment you place your faith and trust in Christ...there's a death and a resurrection...there's the creation of a new person and a new union...
- you die to sin and you're raised to new life in Him...
- you die to your self-righteousness and you're clothed in the righteousness of Christ...
- as we saw earlier in this book -- **Colossians 1:13 - For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son...**
- and this is taught in some very pivotal places in Scripture...**Romans 6:3–4 - Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.**

- Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- now, Paul makes one other observation about your position in verse 3...what is it?...

#### **D. Your life is hidden.**

- Colossians 3:3 - For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

- in what sense is that true?...John MacArthur offers three answers to that question...

##### **1. You share a common life with the Father and Son.**

- 1 Corinthians 6:17 - But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.
- 2 Peter 1:4 - ...you may become partakers of *the* divine nature...

- so you are hidden with Christ in God...you share a common life...

##### **2. This new life is concealed from the world.**

- Paul says clearly – this is hidden...

- 1 Corinthians 2:14 - But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.
- 1 John 3:2 - Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be...

- and also that...

##### **3. Christians are eternally secure, hidden protectively from all spiritual foes.**

- John 10:28 - ...and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

- so how is it that many followers of Jesus Christ can live in a way that is appropriately heavenly minded?...or at least headed in that direction?...

- it's because of the power of their position in Christ and their increasing recognition of the implications of what God has done and seeks to continue to do...

- see, they're united with Christ, and they've been raised with Him, and they've died with Him, and their life is hidden with Christ in God...

- so what does that look like?...in short, it looks amazing...

- let me describe for you what I often observe on a Sunday morning around here...

- when I arrive there are usually members of the sound crew at either of our campuses...and members of our worship teams...

- why would they be here so early?...it's because they want our worship to be sweet and honoring to the Lord...they want to lift all of our hearts to heaven and help us place our burdens and challenges there...

- but it's not forced or raw duty – it's something far more delightful...it's the natural result of living for / through / by / to the Person to whom they're united...

- and sure it doesn't make sense to the lost and dying world...because those values and passions are hidden and they wouldn't make sense to someone who isn't alive in Christ...

- then you have Pastor Trey and his entire group of nursery workers and children's workers...there are hundreds of them...what could explain their willingness to study and prepare their lesson

throughout the week...and then make whatever sacrifices in their schedule in order to teach the word of God to the children of our church and community?...and in some cases...people who have been doing that for decades?...

- that's not raw duty...it's the power of their position...
- the week before last I had been in FL teaching at WOLBI, then I traveled to MN for one of our OTR training events...I returned Saturday evening and since Brent and Rob were speaking I was able to enjoy worshipping with our church family...and it was so delightful to see this very passage in action...
- I enjoyed, for example...watching some of our dear single men and women in our church...some of them were serving joyfully out in the coffee ministry...others enthusiastically singing...because they have died to themselves and have been raised to a new life in Christ...
- it was moving to see some of our dear widows and widowers...some rather new in that position...and no one is saying it's easy – we're not going to sugar coat it...
- but their minds were on heaven...they were worshipping our Savior...to One to whom they are united...
- it's so great to have our young ladies from Vision of Hope as part of our church family...and now young men from Bethany Farms...followed by a few skateboarders and college students in flip flops and on and on...
- something had to happen to us positionally to make that possible...and it's a beautiful thing...
- but you undoubtedly noticed this too – Paul didn't just talk about your present position...he also emphasized...

## *II. Your Purposeful Pursuit*

- embedded in these statements about our position is two clear commands...two imperatives...what are they?...

### **A. Keep seeking things that are above.**

- **Colossians 3:1** - ...**keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.**
- **zeteo – continuous action – keep seeking**
- it's just like Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount - **Matthew 6:33** - **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**
- so what does that look like?...well, you can wake up in the morning and start seeking the things that are on earth...or the things that are in heaven...
- in other words...your purposes, and your pursuits, and your pleasures...or what your sovereign God desires to accomplish in and through you...
- so maybe, just maybe...your kids aren't perfectly sanctified yet...
- and you're tempted to try to manipulate them through explosions of sinful anger...or other parenting short-cuts...whatever works fastest on earth this very moment...
- or, you seek things that are above...which is why you got up before them so you could spend some time in the Word and prayer asking the Person to whom you're united for help and strength for the day...
- and you asked the Lord to help you to rejoice in those weaknesses in your children because of the opportunities they would provide to try to get at issues of the heart...conversations that could have eternal consequences...the reason the One seated at the right hand of God gave them to begin with...
- and then you go to your job...and you're either seeking what you want out of that day at work...or what the One to whom you're united wants...

- a great question for all of us to ask is – are you seeking what’s above right now?...is that what’s leading to choices you’re making, and the words you’re speaking...

- the second command is similar...

**B. Set your mind on things above**

- **Colossians 3:2 - Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**

- **phroneo – think – have this inner disposition (MacArthur, p. 129)**

- see, Paul is transitioning us from all the great truths about our sufficiency in Christ in chapters 1-2 to what that ought to look like in real life...

- for example, I would encourage you right now to consider this...what if anything would be different if you were more heavenly minded?...

- in other words, if because of the power of your union with Christ...you were more consistent at...

- seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God...

- and setting your mind on the things above, not on the things of earth...

- what if anything would be different...

- in fact, can I give you a homework assignment?...find a time in the next seven days and turn off all your electronic devices...your TV, your phone, your sound system, your I-Pad, everything...

- and honestly meditate on these verses and that question...and then put an action plan together to specifically change whatever needs to be changed...

- how about this – how many would say, I need to worry less...

- I’ve been convicted of that with this Northend Community Center project...we’ve been working on this behind the scenes for a couple of years...and the Lord has done some amazing things already...

- and some of those things I had sinfully worried about...which must be pretty offensive to our Savior who is seated...seated at the right hand of God...

- it is impossible to do what this passage of Scripture is commanding and sinfully worry at the same time...

- and what’s worse – we’re going into a period of due diligence requirements for the next six months that is rather long and complicated...and the insidious thing is – I’ve found myself asking the Lord to forgive me for sinfully worrying about things in the past He’s now worked out...and five minutes later...sinfully worrying about the next steps...

- what about the matter of contentment?...you know the Scripture says...**Philippians 2:14 - Do all things without grumbling or disputing;**

- that’s pretty straightforward, isn’t it?...

- so when we’re complaining – are we seeking the things that are above (acknowledging God’s sovereignty – and His right to give us whatever He wants us to have, whenever He wants us to have it, however He wants us to have it – looking for whatever purpose He might have at the time)...so are we seeking the things that are above...

- or, are we seeking the things that are on earth?....

- are we setting on minds on the things above...or the things that are on earth?...

- complaining and heavenly mindedness don’t go together very well, do they?...

- this principle has some very important implications to us as a church family as well...you have a handout in your bulletin about an input event after CFN this evening regarding our Strategic Ministry Planning process...[Heather – please insert a pic of the top of the handout]...
- can I ask you to begin praying about that regularly?...
- we actually weren't scheduled to do this for another year...but the Lord has given us so many unexpected opportunities since we completed our last one that we really believe we needed to update it this year...
- what a perfect opportunity for us as a church family to practice what this passage is calling us to...
- and if we're seeking and setting our minds on earth...that will lead to one kind of plan...
- if we're seeking and setting our minds on thing above, it will be entirely different, won't it?...
  
- [if time discuss – nothing to prove, not interested in a legacy, the issue is the pace at which we want to try to accomplish what we believe God has for us]...
  
- there's also implication of this to Serve 17 [Heather – please insert the art Trey is using]...
- I'm glad for the progress that has been made to be sure our children's ministries are fully staffed...we now have 83% of the positions filled...but we still have 96 opportunities to fill...
- I would ask each one of us – have you considered this through the lens of the things above...what God wishes to accomplish in and through you and in the lives of the children of our community...or on the things on earth – the sacrifice and inconvenience it might mean to you...
- see, do we really find our sufficiency in Christ...or do we find our sufficiency in our convenience?...
  
- so Paul talks about your present position, and your purposeful pursuit, and lastly...

### *III. Your Future Presentation*

- we're going to have to decide this as a church family...we're congregationally governed so we decide things like our future plan together...and it is very much a grass-roots, ground up process...
- but if the past is any indication of what we'll decide – it's likely the plan will be fairly aggressive...with all sorts of sacrifice involved, perhaps even financial sacrifice...
- and much of that will make very little sense to those around you, and those around us who don't know the Lord...and don't really understand us...
- but what does this passage promise?...
- **Colossians 3:4 - When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**
- see, that's what many just can't understand...
- this isn't a religion for us...or a set of rituals...or rules...
- Jesus Christ is our life...He's the way, the truth, the life – no man comes to the Father by Him...
- so when we think about what we're to do today, and what we're to do in the days ahead...we seek the things that are above...that's where we set our minds...
- and a lot of that is not going to make a lot of sense until we are revealed with Him in glory...
- the announcement was made about the new NCC during the week of our BCTC...because we had just learned that our project had been selected for the final funding stream we needed to make it all possible...
- so that Friday the paper asked me to come down to the project site and talk about the project and they took a picture that was on the front page of the Saturday paper...
- then I headed down to FL to teach at WOL and that week we had a couple of input opportunities for folks and businesses in that part of town...

- and it was almost entirely positive...but there was a person or two that was upset because the north end had been portrayed in a negative light...
- and those who were actually at the meeting know that the speaker was actually talking as much about the way the media talks about the north end as anything else...
- but by time that hit the paper the article gave the impression that there were all sorts of north end neighbors bristling...
- so how do we respond to that?...
- 1. Well, ultimately that's a leadership failure on my part because the buck always stops here...Pastor Goode used to say that the major problem is often with the major prophet...and I need to find ways to discuss challenges without it being perceived as overly negative or some kind of personal attack...
- so I'm quite certain I have some growing to do...and this passage would instruct me to view that article through the lens of heaven...
- 2. It's also true that a few folks in town don't like us because we are a Bible believing church so there will be criticism of whatever we say or do...that's why we shouldn't worry too much about the approval of man on earth...don't seek or set your mind there...
- 3. At some point these are spiritual realities because our adversary likes to tear things down – including people and lives and relationships and buildings and businesses and everything else a community...
- and He doesn't like it when something might be encouraged or built up...especially in the name of the One seated at the right hand of God...
- something that helped me that very week was reading *More Than a Bird* by Liz Huntley
- it's the story of a woman who grew up in poverty in Clanton, AL...she was abused in ways that are heartbreaking...
- but because of a number of social service agencies and a local church...Elizabeth Huntley was able to graduate from Auburn University and then the Alabama School of Law...
- [read from pp. 33-34]...
- I really believe the Lord wants us to find, love, and serve boys and girls in the north end, and all over our community – just like Liz Huntley...that's what Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God, is concerned about...
- let's seek and set our minds on that