

## “New Year Priorities”

### Colossians 3:1-4

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The beginning of each year is a good time to evaluate and redirect priorities. It is a time to decide what will be most important in your life for the next twelve months and pursue it with your time, talents and resources. Does the Bible give guidance to this process? I think so and one of the places is Colossians 3:1-4. Paul talked to the baptized believers in Colosse about ordering their priorities.

*“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”*

**Was Paul instructing his readers to ignore this world and neglect their earthly responsibilities?** Was he discounting the value of this world and its place in a believer’s life? Hardly. The verses that followed this passage contain specific moral and ethical instructions that revealed how important this world was to Paul and other believers. Paul was not encouraging his readers to ignore this world but to give it its proper place in their lives and especially their priorities. Paul knew that Christians had to live in this world, but he also knew they did not have to make the pursuit of wealth, power, prestige, fame or possessions their highest priority. They had other choices and better ones at that.

So, Paul admonished his readers to “set their hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things.” **What are “the things that are above?”** I suppose they could be many things, but I share three with you. I believe the “things that are above” are things that are lovely, healthy and permanent.

The **lovely** things in life are those things that bring out the best in others and us. I am referring to grace, mercy, compassion, unselfishness, courtesy, kindness, faithfulness, loyalty, forgiveness, humility, courage, faith, hope and love. These are the qualities that make us better people and the world a lovelier place.

I have often said that every person is a combination of the good, bad and ugly. We promote the good, endure the bad and hide the ugly. What determines which side of us will emerge depends upon what we pursue. If we seek the things of this world, they can bring the worst out in us. The desire for power, prestige, possessions, fame and wealth can make us do some ugly things.

It appears the directors and officers of Enron bear proof of this. It has been reported that twenty-nine directors and officers sold more than one billion dollars in stock before the public learned the company was in danger of collapse. Evidently, the four years prior to this, earnings were inflated by \$586,000,000. As a result, employees, retirees and stockholders were caught by surprise when the company declared bankruptcy and their stock dropped from a high of ninety dollars to pennies, causing them to lose their investments. That’s ugly! That’s also sinful.

On the other hand, if we pursue the “things that are above,” we may or may not end up with the things of this world, but we will be good people who make the world a better place to live. I have to believe when all is said and done, that this legacy of goodness will bring us more satisfaction and pride.

When you talk to your children and grandchildren about selecting a mate, encourage them to choose someone who brings the best out in them and inspires them to be good. Help them to look for someone whose heart and mind are set on “things from above,” for this kind of person will make them better and their marriage more fulfilling.

Ask President Bush. I believe he will tell you this is true. He has openly stated that he is where he is today and the man he is because of the positive influence of his wife, Laura. He is a testimony to the fact that the lovely things in life really do bring out the best in others and us.

The **healthy** things in life are those things that build us up, not tear us down. They are things that strengthen, not weaken us, such as, honesty, truthfulness, encouragement, discipline and challenges. These are the “fruits and vegetables” of life that lead to a strong spirit.

The **permanent** things in life are those things that are eternal, not temporal. They are things that will last up to the grave and beyond, such as character and relationships. The people who “seek things from above” will pursue above all else those things that will build character and strengthen relationships.

**I wish I could tell you that it will be easy to seek the things from “above.”**

You and I know it will not be. The things of this world have a strong pull, don't they? To seek “the things from above” will require continuous effort and focused determination. Perhaps this was why Paul chose the present tense imperatives, seek and set. Arranging our priorities will be a daily necessity that will require the greatest amount of discipline.

**If seeking the “things from above” is going to be such a struggle, then why should we do it?** Seeking the “things from above” will enable us to live life to its fullest and prepare us to die. This arrangement of priorities will lead to abundant and eternal life. Those who are faithful to seek “the things from above” will be surrounded by the protective presence of God symbolized by baptism and have fellowship with Him and His followers forever.

No more fitting words than John Baillie's could be read to conclude this sermon. “My life today will be lived in time, but eternal issues will be concerned in it. The needs of my body will be important, but it is for the needs of my soul that I must care most. My business will be with things material, but behind them, let me be aware of things spiritual. Let me keep steadily in mind that the things that matter are not money or possessions, not houses or lands, not bodily comfort or pleasure, but truth, honor, meekness, helpfulness and a pure love of Thee.”