

## [Colossians 2:20-3:4](#)

### An Eternal Resolution: Look to Jesus

#### **Introduction**

Who has made New Years resolutions? All of us have to some extent. Whether it's losing weight, getting physically fit or spending less money, resolutions are meant to change, and in some cases radically change, the status quo for something better. After all, who doesn't want to look better, feel better and save more money?

There's nothing wrong with making resolutions. However, if our heart really isn't "all-in" for keeping a resolution, it'll eventually fade away. We're left with nothing more than good intentions that went nowhere. That's because resolutions often involve matters which are temporal and worldly; they are grounded in the flesh and depend upon personal performance or ability.

God's Word, the Bible, calls us to something much more. Something that's much higher and eternally life-changing. God calls us to Himself through Christ. It's a radical change, which only He can effect through the work of the Holy Spirit. His call is the flagship verse of the text, which is to look to eternal things instead of earthly things. In other words, look to Jesus. Here's [Colossians 3:2](#).

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.  
[Col 3:2](#) (ESV)

Therefore, in the text as a whole, ([Colossians 2:20-3:4](#)) there are three (3) points that I'd like for us to take away concerning this eternal resolution to look to Jesus. These points involve an admonishment, an exhortation and an encouragement:

- Admonishment - Why look to the world? ([Colossians 2:20-23](#))
- Exhortation - Look to Jesus! ([Colossians 3:1-2](#))
- Encouragement - Life is secure in Christ. ([Colossians 3:3-4](#))

#### **1. Admonishment - Why Look to the World?**

Right out of the gate, the apostle Paul admonished the church at Colossae ([Colossians 2:20](#)). He warned them about false teaching, which encouraged submitting to man-made rules and regulations instead of being totally rooted and built up in Christ. In essence, Paul was saying "Beware of those who try to convince you to live like people of the world when you're people of God" In fact, here's what he stated in [Colossians 2:8](#).

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.  
[Col 2:8](#) (ESV)

His admonishment included the fact that a person's identity in Christ meant dying to the elemental spirits of the world. What are elemental spirits of the world? Those are things that are earthly, carnal, legal and sinful. They're the man-made rules of "do's" and "don'ts" that seem so plausible.

When I was growing up in North Carolina, do you know what I believed a Christian was? A Christian was a person who didn't smoke, didn't drink and didn't cuss. In fact to this day, I still struggle with the very thing that God inspired Paul to write about when he admonished the church. I struggle with my own self-made religion, which says "Surely real Christians don't do that." However, that sort of thinking is so wrong and so unbiblical. Can you relate to me?

Indeed, God's Word admonishes all of us to beware of man-made rules and regulations. In addition, there's a warning about asceticism ([Colossians 2:23](#)). Asceticism is defined as the practice of austere self-discipline in order to bring about unity with God.

Consider the plight of a monk struggling with lust. Praying harder, fasting longer and worshipping better won't resolve the issue. A resolution of doing more and trying harder has the appearance of wisdom. But what appears to be of value is in reality of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh ([Colossians 2:23](#)).

If I'm trying to find favor with God by making up for what I've done or haven't done, I'm wasting my time. Reading my Bible more, attending church regularly or giving generously to charity looks nice, but in effect cannot change my heart. My heart, which is deceptive and evil ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)), needs to die to sin and live by faith in Christ. Here's [Galatians 2:20](#).

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[Gal 2:20](#) (ESV)

True change has to occur on the inside. There has to be a resolution birthed by the Holy Spirit, where abdication of the reign of sin is accomplished through receiving God's grace and mercy in Christ. Here's what Paul Tripp, pastor and author, says about bringing true change in a person's heart. "So what we need most is not a change of locations or relationship, but a fundamental rescue of the heart, and that is exactly what God's grace in the person of the Holy Spirit provides for us."

That's the "new self" which is grounded in Christ. That's the new self, which is all about being raised with Christ to a new life in Him. Therefore, look to things above; look to Jesus.

## **2. Exhortation - Look to Jesus!**

So, here's the exhortation: look to the things above and not to the things on earth ([Colossians 3:1-2](#)). What does that mean? It means looking to Jesus Himself! Where do we find Him? Christ is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). And for those who are Christ-followers, we have been raised with Him and are seated with Him in the heavenly places. Wait - what!? Is that really true? It's one of God's promises for new a life in Christ. Here's [Ephesians 2:4-6](#).

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

[Eph 2:4-6](#) (ESV)

Did you ever think about that? If you're in Christ, you've been raised with Him to a new life now, right now. A new life in Christ means living and trusting in Him. There's a spiritual rebirth involved for the person who trusts Christ. The Bible calls it born again. For the born again believer, there's an exhortation to lay aside every weight and sin and look to Jesus. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He is seated in heaven at the right hand of God ([Hebrews 12:1-2](#)).

Consider also that things above are eternal and unseen ([2 Corinthians 4:18](#)). For example, the believer has an inheritance reserved in heaven, which is pure, undefiled and unfading ([1 Peter 1:4](#)). There's a restored relationship with God as Father and the promise of eternal life. Set your minds on those things, which are above. In other words, set your minds on the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we seek what is above and set our minds on Jesus, there's a focus on His splendor, majesty and greatness. Sinclair Ferguson, noted Scottish theologian, author and pastor, said this about where we're setting our minds - "What do you think about when you've nothing to think about"? Do our minds focus on earthly things, perhaps even those things that would cause us to sin? Rather, the exhortation is to look to Christ Jesus Himself, especially when our thoughts wander.

When the mind and heart are set on things above, there are two (2) distinct differences between the world and a Christ-follower that are noticeable. First of all, there is an aroma of Christ. Take a look at [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](#).

<sup>15</sup> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. [2 Cor 2:15-16](#) (ESV)

In the "Our Daily Bread" devotional, writer Sheridan Voysey tells the story of author Rita Snowden who was sitting outside at a cafe in Dover, England enjoying a cup of tea. She became aware of a fragrant aroma. Wondering where the fragrance was emanating from, she asked the waiter and found out it was from the people passing by. Most of the villagers were employed by a perfume factory. As they headed home from work, the scent of the perfume had permeated their clothes and was carried into the street.

Would people say La Crescent Evangelical Free Church (LEFC) exudes the aroma of Christ? Is there a sweetness and fragrance of the love of Christ at LEFC that permeates its people, which points to Jesus as irresistible and delightful? Is their evidence, that as the church, we are setting our minds on things above, which means more Christ-centeredness and less self-centeredness?

Secondly, hearts and minds looking above to Christ instead of the things of the world will be like lights shining in a dark place. In fact, Jesus says that His followers are the light of the world. His exhortation is to let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God ([Matthew 5:14-16](#)).

A city on a hill cannot be hidden, nor should a lamp be covered. If you've flown into a large city at night, such as Chicago, you know what an incredibly amazing sight it is to see all of the lights. In fact, the beauty of the lights can be so awe-inspiring that you tell others about it. Likewise, you don't put a lamp under a basket. No, you put it on a lampstand, so that it gives light to all in the house. For those trusting the Lord, would we say our "Christ-light" is under a basket or on a hill? And if it is hidden, why is that?

With the world growing spiritually darker, Jesus the Light of Life, needs to shine through His followers in order that the light of the gospel illuminates the darkness. All of us are in dire need of the light of the gospel. In fact, not one of us needs the gospel any more or any less than the next person. That's why all of us, and in fact the entire world, need encouragement. Encouragement is found in Jesus Himself. He is the only One where security, shelter and safety is found. He is the foundation of joy, hope and peace. Who needs encouragement? We all do.

### **3. Encouragement - Life is Secure in Christ**

If you're a Christ-follower, are you encouraged? According to Scripture, you've died to the elemental things of the world and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Not only that, a glorious future lies ahead in His presence. In effect, life is secure in Christ now and for eternity. There's three (3) reasons in the text ([Colossians 3:3-4](#)) why this is so.

First of all, the person who is trusting Christ has died *to* sin. That's because Christ died *for* sin. What an encouragement to have the assurance that Jesus willingly received God's wrath for punishment of sin by shedding His blood on the cross. That's really good news. However, embracing that good news means dying to self and to the world. And that's difficult because there's a cost. It means putting to death what is earthly and sinful. Here's [Colossians 3:5](#).

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

[Col 3:5](#) (ESV)

Putting to death what is sinful cannot be done halfway. Resolutions of the flesh won't make it here because they are dependent upon self. Instead, an everlasting resolution involves longing for the things above, craving Christ Himself. Otherwise, sinful desires are proliferated. Much like half-hearted resolutions, sin dealt with half-heartedly leaves us where we began. Here's what Jesus says about dealing with sin in a radical and revolutionary fashion in [Matthew 5:29](#). Realize, too, that Jesus is using metaphorical imagery. Otherwise, we'd all be without eyes.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

[Matt 5:29](#) (ESV)

Second, there's encouragement in the fact that those in Christ are hidden in Him. What does it mean to be hidden in Christ? The word hidden suggests security, safety and shelter. He is the refuge, rock, fortress and deliverer ([2 Samuel 22:2](#) and [Psalm 18:2](#)). Here's [Proverbs 18:10](#).

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.  
[Prov 18:10](#) (ESV)

Let me reiterate the truth about the believer being hidden in Christ. It means that you've died to the world; you're alive in Christ. You belong to Him; He bought you with His precious blood. He cares about you or He wouldn't have died for you on the cross. His resurrection validates everything He said and did. Hidden in Christ means that He that is in you, the Holy Spirit, is greater than he, Satan, who is in the world.

On the other hand, the world, the flesh and Satan will try to convince us otherwise. All of the earthly things that vie for our hearts desire whisper in our ears "Follow me". The world will say "Go ahead; try it; you'll like it." Our flesh will say "Maybe I should; you only live once." And Satan will set us up to knock us down and say "Go ahead; you deserve it." Then afterwards he'll say "Now, look what you did; God certainly couldn't love you."

Third, a life that's in Christ has the promise of being with Him when He appears in glory. This describes the consummation of spiritual life - the glorification with the Lord Jesus in heaven. Think of it this way - if Christ is your life, you're not who you once were, and you're not yet who you're supposed to be. Here's [1 John 3:2](#).

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.  
[1 John 3:2](#) (ESV)

Some glorious day, the faith of every believer shall become sight. What once was a dim reflection as in a mirror shall be face to face; what was only known partially of Christ will be fully known in His presence ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)). His glorious appearing will be shared by those who were purchased with His blood from every tribe, tongue, people and nation ([Revelation 5:9](#)). Will you be there holding fast to Him when He appears?

Richard DeHaan, writer for the "Our Daily Bread" devotional, related a story from F. B. Meyer, British pastor, evangelist and author during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Meyer told a story about two men who wanted to climb the Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps. Three guides were hired to accomplish the dangerous ascent. The five men were roped together for their safety with a guide in the middle and one at each end.

As the climb began, the last man slipped, but he was held securely by the other four. However, the next man slipped and caused the two in front of him to lose traction on the steep slope. Only the first guide was able to hold on because he had driven a spike into the ice. The one man was able to hold all of the others securely, which meant the difference between life and death.

Meyer concluded the story by saying, "I am like one of those men who slipped, but thank God, I am bound in a living partnership to Christ. And because He stands I will never perish."

How about you? Do you have a living partnership to Christ? Is your life hidden in Christ, safe and secure? Do you have the assurance of appearing with Jesus in glory? If not, you'll perish when you slip on the steep and dangerous slope of sin. Only the Lord Jesus is the One who holds all securely who trust in Him. He is the lifeline of grace and mercy that sinners can hold fast to.

If you haven't received God's grace by trusting Christ, you can do that now. There is no one beyond God's reach that He cannot and will not save. Repent and believe. Repentance involves turning away from sin and turning toward God. Belief means trusting God at His Word. He's in the business of rescuing sinners, like you and me, in spite of our weaknesses, mistakes and failures.

And if you've been trusting Jesus, perhaps for decades, we need a reminder that hidden in Him means that He is our life. Contrary to what our flesh, the world or Satan says, a life in Christ means undergoing a revolutionary, radical and reconciling transformation. God in Christ is in the business of not only rescuing sinners, but walking with sinners, saved by grace, whose eternal security is held fast in His steadfast love.

### **Conclusion**

Resolutions often involve complete, radical and sudden changes. Resolutions of the flesh are based in man-made rules and regulations and are therefore subject to failure. An eternal resolution, on the other hand, is grounded on the solid rock that is Christ Himself. So, here's an admonishment, exhortation and encouragement.

First the admonishment: Rules and regulations will change; Christ remains the same yesterday, today and forever ([Hebrews 13:8](#)). Why live as if each day depended upon "do's" and "don'ts"? Why not live a life with freedom in Christ?

Now the exhortation: Look to things above and not to things on earth. The world will fail; Christ will succeed. In our flesh, we will make mistakes; Christ will be perfect. Live a life that's raised with Christ. He will never leave you nor forsake you ([Deuteronomy 31:6](#)).

Finally the encouragement: A life in Christ is safe and secure in Him. No one or nothing can separate the believer from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). A life that's hidden with Christ in God embraces the Lord as the foundation of joy, hope and peace.

Here's a final thought. In just a few days the old year ends and a new year begins. What would 2020 look like if we took Paul's exhortation seriously to seek the things that are above, that is Christ Himself, and not the things that are on earth? As we prepare to turn the pages of the calendar, will our self-made resolutions be initiated only just to fade away? Or will there be an eternal resolution, through the work of the Holy Spirit, which goes against the "do's" and "don'ts" of the world, to receive the grace of God in Christ? The answer is look to the things above. Look to Jesus. Amen.