

THE ZEST FOR LIFE

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2)

Christ took the Colossian Christians from the downward pathway and placed them on the heavenly highway. After reminding them that Christ had conquered death and the grave, and that because they had placed their trust in Him as their Saviour they had passed from death unto life, Paul stressed the kind of life that they were under obligation to live. This is something that needs to be emphasized today as never before. Paul based his appeal to the Colossians on the fact that they had been raised with Christ' consequently, their interests, desires, words, and deeds should be entirely different from what they had been before they had been saved.

Since they had been identified with Christ in His resurrection and had come into possession of eternal life, Paul urged them to seek those things which were really worthwhile and satisfying, namely, those lovely qualities which were exemplified in the life of Christ. Every true Christian knows that there is something within that satisfies, stimulates, and strengthens. Having been saved, it is normal for them to seek higher and heavenly things.

Our Lord wants all of His followers to lift their eyes above the sordid things of earth, and to set their affections on Him and His work. Both our thoughts and our energies must be centered on the doing of the blessed will of the risen and reigning Christ. It is our privilege and duty to exhibit the spirit of Christ in our daily lives, as proof of the fact that we have been saved.

This portion of God's Word sets forth our position and reveals what our condition should be. The standing of the Christian is proclaimed as being in complete oneness with the risen Christ, and because of this the Christian's state should give evidence of the resurrection life. Here Paul is stressing the blessedness and the dignity of the believer in Christ. Paul is not only concerned to point out the position which we hold in Christ by faith, but to reveal to us the communion which we enjoy with Christ in that position. This risen life is always expressing itself in aspiration, in longing for higher ground and holier attainment. The redeemed man has ever been an upward-looking one, and saying, "The best is yet to be." Just here is one of the outstanding differences between the non-Christian man and the Christian.

How much are you enjoying fellowship with Christ? If you are a Christian, you know that you are in Christ. You know that you are accepted in Him, the Beloved. You know that God has forgiven your sins for His sake. But how far are these things real in your experience? How much are you enjoying being with Christ? Is it true in your experience that you are living a life which is risen with Christ?

Paul wrote about "things above," and the importance of seeking them because he was well aware of the fact that we seek the things that belong to the level on which we live. If our lives are dominated by the flesh, then we will seek fleshly things that belong to the level on which we live, and thus make provision for the further activities of our fleshly nature. If we dwell on a worldly level, it is very likely that we will seek worldly things. On the authority of the Scriptures I can boldly assert there are higher levels and better things. Any Christian is in a pitiful condition spiritually when he does not seem to be conscious of "things above."

Think of the story of the Pharisee and the publican. What a contrast in these two men! The Pharisee looked inward and decided that he had reached the top, that he had already ascended to the highest possible peak and that there was not anything beyond for him. Evidently he thought that he had arrived. His level of living was

exceedingly low. His only attitude was that of looking down. He said, "I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." How dreadful! There was not any yearning in his soul for "things above," no longing for something better, no aspiration to seek God and those things which center in Him. His soul was divested of any sense of want. His horizon never reached beyond the narrow confines of himself.

The human mind is an exceedingly important element in our personal spiritual experience. It is here that decisions are made and registered. It is here that truth is articulated and applied. The human mind determines how far what God has revealed is going to be experienced by us. By "mind" is meant the "faculty of perceiving and judging." Your mind is a definite factor in your spiritual life. Your mind is also the determining factor in your spiritual life.

"Set your affection on things above." In other words, give your mind and heart to something; fasten your feelings on something high enough to hold them. That is good sense, good psychology, and good religion. It is the only way to a zestful life and the only sound prescription for its opposite, a deep malady of the human spirit more prevalent now than in any previous generation.

An English clergyman sat in the downtown office of a physician and friend. As the roar of the London traffic floated through the open window, the doctor said, "After all, the most deadly of human diseases is one which we cannot touch with a knife or save people from with drugs." "You mean cancer?" "Oh, no. We'll get that little devil yet, or devils. I mean boredom. There is more real wretchedness, more torment driving men to folly, or what you parsons call sin, due to boredom than to anything else. Men and women will do almost anything to escape it. They will drink, drug themselves, sell their bodies and their souls, fling themselves into crazy causes; they will torture themselves and other people to escape the misery of being bored. Anyone who discovers the cure for that will put an end to more human tragedy than can all of us doctors put together."

The misery of being bored! What is boredom? How do people get bored in a world like this? And why is it that men and women will do almost anything to escape the misery of being bored?

The Bible says, "Out of the heart are the issues of life." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart..." (Matthew 22:37). And such is the nature of the human heart that it must love something. Its hungers must be fed as the hungers of the body; the affections must be set on something. The strong feelings must have something to lay hold upon, to wrap themselves around, or lacking it leave a hunger as painful in the soul as hunger in the body when it does not have any solid food. Here, then, in part is the torment of boredom: an emptiness in the soul, a basic human need unanswered, an unfed craving of the heart for some devotion to give life glory and meaning, a zest for life.

The bored people are not the busy people. They are the empty people, whether busy or not, people with nothing to live for and nothing outside themselves to fix the affections upon, for whom life is void of meaning. Boredom is just another name for emptiness, largely, though not always, self-induced emptiness. For the most part boredom is the penalty of withheld affection, the price people pay for detachment from life participation. It is the curse that life puts in the empty heart that is too lazy to face responsibility or too fearful to give itself in love.

Some thoughtful people are now wondering if western civilization is not gradually and unconsciously reverting to the ancient concept of reducing life to emptiness and nothingness. In our frantic search for security, in our dedication of science to personal comfort, and in our channeling of all this new control of nature to the end of making life so smooth and comfortable, our idea of roughing it is turning the electric-blanket dial down to low. How can we take the risks out of life, make it smooth and comfortable, and escape the penalty of boredom? The answer is: we can not. The sense of futility is increasing in western life; we are beginning, too, to suffer from nothingness. Many young people have too much and are world-weary. They are "Fed-up at fifteen, fagged out at forty." How tragic for one to come to the banquet table of life without an appetite!

If you want the clue to most of our fed-up-ness, it is because we have set the ceiling too low for our stature. This sense of futility and world-weariness, which has settled down on the human spirit, is only another proof that modern man has tried to live as if he were a child of this world only. He has set his mind and affection on the world.

The real zest for life comes in the conviction that life has lasting meaning, that what we do here has significance because our lives are linked with the creative purposes of God. People of the western world must lift their sights again. The zest goes out of life when it does not have a lasting, compelling interest. Life bores only when it loses interest. Set your affections on things above. Get hold of something big enough to hold you.

Our Lord never meant for any life to be empty or bored for want of interest. There are so many things to fill it, so many things to learn, to know, to be, and to do. Sir Wilfred Grenfell fell in love with people and set his affection on the health of those living on Labrador. One night he made a speech in a church about his early years there, and of course the hardships broke through in the words he spoke. After the service a woman profusely praised him for this great sacrifice. He said, "Oh, lady, you completely misunderstood me. I was having the time of my life."

Life can be exhilarating when you set your affection on things above, and lay hold on something that holds you. It does not mean that you will be happy all of the time. As Woodrow Wilson said, "Life isn't all running to a fire. Not everything is exciting." But if we have the consciousness that what we do, however unnoticed, adds up to something with a bit of eternal significance, that it contributes some modest part to some great total God is adding up, life will take on an unexpected luster of glory, zest, and meaning.

Let us desire, inquire into, and examine the things which are above. Such things actually exist. We are challenged to give our minds to the things which are above.

It is said that when Galileo was yet a youth under twenty years of age, he stood one day in the metropolitan church of Pisa where he observed a swinging lamp suspended from the ceiling. Thousands had seen it before; but Galileo was impressed by the regularity with which it moved backward and forward. Reflecting upon it, he later perfected the pendulum which has been used in measuring time even to this day. Thus we have a fine illustration of what is meant by seeking those things which are above. God expects us to take them into account and to give them earnest consideration. We are to beware lest Satan allure our attention and persuade us to abandon the race.

There should be something about all of us who are Christians which makes it quite clear and evident to those around us that we are living with Christ. In the days of the apostles the Jews took knowledge of the disciples that they had been "with Jesus."

And, obviously, we cannot live with Christ without it showing in our characters and lives, in our attitudes and in our deportment or conduct. A prince is not free to live just how he likes; he has to remember always that he is a prince; that he belongs to the royal house; and that a certain kind of dignity and behavior are expected from him. We need to remember that, having been raised from our lost condition and brought into the family of God, we do not have any right to be living as ordinary men and women. We do not have any right to be conformed to this world; and God forbid that we should set out to try to show the world how much like it we are, in order to impress somebody. It is our duty and responsibility to show to the world how different we are from it, in order that there may be created in the hearts of men and women a longing to discover the secret that is so manifest in our lives and characters. There must be a different quality of life in us. If we are living with Christ, His presence will shame the unseemly thought, silence the unseemly word, and sanctify, ennoble, and uplift us in every phase of our living.