

If you would, turn with me to Colossians 3. Tonight, we're going to be looking at the first four verses: Colossians 3:1-4. And we'll get to that in just a second. Tonight, we address the subject of overcoming personal failure. This is something that we are not immune from, something that we are very knowledgeable of: we've all been there. We all know what it means to have a singular sin that seems to cling to us, that we long to be rid of and yet, over and over again, it seems like it just keeps coming back. We determine that we're not ever going to commit it again. We set our resolve and we pray, and we're tempted and we fail again. Whether it's sins on the internet, gossip, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, I mean, the list goes on and on and on so we're not going to try to name all of them, but you know. You know the one that just seems to be your personal thorn in your side. How do we break free from that? Is there freedom? Do we have hope?

Unfortunately, I'm afraid that in many ways the church, as a whole through history, has often failed in her role to equip her people to deal with and to wage war against the flesh as she should. We're talking about Christians. We're talking about those who long to follow Jesus. Sometimes the church has used a singular approach of just saying, "Stop it. Don't do it anymore." Sometimes the church has sought the aid of the government to legislate against it. The church has used fear or intimidation, even punishment, to curb sinful behavior. Sometimes the church has used the fear of being rejected by God and losing your salvation if you keep it up. This is all a horrific abuse of the Scripture. Sometimes the church has just simply heaped so much shame and guilt upon its people, saying things like, "You know that Jesus died for that sin and here you are, you're nailing that nail into His hand one more time and going deeper and deeper," and all that kind of stuff. I mean, I know and trust that the motives are good, but they are all so wrong. None of these tactics do anything but bring harm. They are just not enough to keep us from sinning, and they are unequal to the task of providing the means by which we can put off that way of life and put on the way of Christ to grow in a strong and healthy and vibrant faith.

So, I ask again, is there hope? I think the Scriptures would say yes. Can we grow in joy and spiritual maturity, being sanctified, the church word for growing in the likeness of Christ? Overwhelmingly, yes. The third chapter of the book of Colossians gives us hope. It gives us hope that we can put away those things that are not Christ-like and that we can grow in Christ-likeness. We are introducing the subject tonight in the first four verses. We are going to see what is missing in our battle with temptation. Why just "try harder," doesn't work. Let's read, Colossians 3:1-4.

"¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

This is the word of God.

I think oftentimes our misguided efforts at trying to put away the sin that so easily entangles us is rooted in the pursuit of pleasure and finding it in the wrong place. Fundamentally, I think we just do not take into account how strong our desire is for satisfaction and pleasure. We

just don't understand that. How much we long for a sense of well-being and happiness. The reason we sin is because we believe it will give us a sense of peace, or a sense of happiness or pleasure that we so much long for. That's why we do it. If it wasn't pleasurable in our own minds, we wouldn't sin. Now, I'll be the first to say that our heads get pretty screwed up by what we think will give us our desire. For example, if we choose not to forgive, or we seek revenge on someone else because they've done something to us, in that moment we feel like we will gain pleasure or a sense of purpose or a sense of well-being by being unforgiving and vengeful. That's what we do. Now, there's all things wrong with that, but that's what we feel. I've described it many times through the years as drinking poison and expecting the other person to get sick.

All sinful behaviors, all sinful actions are the result of seeking pleasure or happiness. Hebrews 11:25 tells us that the pleasure of sin is passing. Now, there's two things that this writer tells us about the pleasure of sin. One, that it's a very real thing, that there is pleasure in sin, but what he also says is that it lasts but a moment! It doesn't last. It is fleeting. This is why, "Just try harder," doesn't work! Those of us who may have stronger wills or more discipline can sometimes hold out longer, but at the end of the day, willpower gives out. Discipline gives out and fails because it doesn't eradicate our longing for pleasure, our sinful longings and pursuits of happiness. Because at the bottom of it all, it is longing for this sense of happiness that leads us to sin. The only way that we may see success and defeat the power of sin and the pleasure, albeit kind of messed up in our head, the pleasure that sin brings, is finding a greater pleasure. Once we find a greater pleasure, then it's not a problem to leave aside the lesser pleasure. I may really long for a ham sandwich until somebody offers me a steak! And when I am offered a steak, the ham sandwich means nothing to me anymore. Do you see? It's a greater pleasure, a greater longing. That is at the heart of what it means to defeat the sin that so easily entangles us. We need something that will give us a greater sense of well-being than that which sin provides. The ability to turn away from sin only comes with a mind that is captivated and controlled by the beauty of Jesus. That, my friends, is where we must go. When your heart is entranced by Jesus, it will not be seduced by lesser things.

We find in our text, Paul says to seek and to set our mind on things above. We see first, "seek the things that are above." He says, "If then you have been raised with Christ," what he's using is an assumption, you might say, "since you have been raised with Christ." This is what we've been talking about for the last several weeks. We have spoken about our identity and our unity with Christ. He's teaching us that he has given us new life because Jesus rose from the dead, I will raise again from the dead. In His physical resurrection, He is the firstborn of many brethren. You and I will be raised again physically at the end of days when He comes again, but it also speaks I think that we who were spiritually dead He has raised to new life and we have become spiritually alive. Then he says, "Seek the things that are above." Now, he's not talking about spatially up, but what he's talking about here are those things that you can't see! Longed for. Seek the things that you can't see, not the things that you can see! Seek the things that are above. Where? Where Christ is! Seek those things. Seek to know and revel in the glory of Jesus Christ. The tense of the verb here means to seek and keep on seeking. It's not a one-time thing, got it, nailed it, let's go move on. It's a spend your life seeking, seeking being captivated by the beauty of Jesus. Treasuring Jesus more than anything else in your world. Finding Him, the pearl of great price, or the treasure that was hidden in a field where the man took everything He owned

and sold it just so he could buy this treasure that's worth more than anything. Spiritual maturity and putting away sinful thoughts and behaviors begins with affection for Jesus. It's all about Jesus. You were saved. You were redeemed. You were given new life so that you might see and appreciate and enjoy the glory of God found in the face of Jesus Christ. That's why you are a new creature. There is nothing legalistic about that. It's not about trying harder it's about trying to see Jesus in His beauty!

Those of you who are familiar with the Westminster Confession of Faith know that the first question is "What is the chief end of man?" It's to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Let's break it down. Glorify. The glory of God is His display of His attributes. He displays His attributes in His righteousness and His justice and His power and His might and His wisdom. He displays those. So, when we glorify God it means we just recognize, we acknowledge, we see that He is glorious. We see that He is wise. We see that He is all-powerful, that He is compassionate and merciful, and we glorify Him! We acknowledge it and we say it and we say, "Isn't it wonderful who our God is?" So, when we glorify God, we recognize His attributes but the confession doesn't stop there! It says, "and enjoy Him"! Isn't that beautiful? It's not only seeing and acknowledging; it's enjoying it and reveling in it! Seeing Him and loving the affection growing for Him. Isn't it funny that this 374-year-old document that some would find stuffy and boring starts with your joy and pleasure in the beauty and the glory of God? You see, that's at the root of it all!

This is where we find victory over sinful desires, this is how it works! For the follower of Jesus, when we sin, in that moment we believe that the pleasure of sin is greater than the pleasure that we can find in the glory of Jesus. That's what we believe in that moment. We convince ourselves that nothing Jesus can provide us will be as satisfying as what that sinful pleasure is. And so that's why we pursue it. We trade Him, our greatest pleasure, for that lesser pleasure. So, the question of the moment is, what do we find most desirable? Jesus or... you fill in the blank. Whatever that trinket that the world has to offer is. Let me share some pictures. Because it's really important for us to understand this truth.

Why does a spouse cheat on their mate? Why would they do that? Well, it's very simple. They believe that the pleasure they can find in someone else is more than the pleasure that they can find in their mate. Point blank. That's it. Right? Same way in a spiritual sense. Why would we ever sin? It's because we think that the mistress of sin will bring us more pleasure than the glory of Christ. Have you ever been to a Mardi Gras parade? So much fun. "Hey Mister, throw me some beads!" Right? And they throw these plastic, cheap beads and you'd do almost anything to try to get those beads. It's crazy. You're in a crowded street and fighting over a bunch of beads. Trinkets. But we find them desirable, we want to wear all these beads on our front. What if you were standing in front of a jeweler and a jeweler came to you and said, "Look, I know you're here, but I have some gems or jewels that I'd love to give to you." I've never been in that situation, I'm open to being in that situation, but let's just imagine it, right? Would you turn from the excitement of getting the trinkets and look and see the gems that the jeweler would have to offer? Of course you would, right? That of greater value so displaces that of lesser value.

Finally, a passage that I've shared with you before is Jeremiah 2:13. It says, "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." The picture here is of a man dying of thirst. Thirsty. On his last leg. Desperately needing water and finding that on his right there is a fountain flowing with cool, clear, crystal, clean water bubbling up from the ground in abundance and yet, turning away from this fountain of living water he tries to dig out a

hole to make a cistern so that when it rains, the muddy water will fill up and he can get a drink. Now, how foolish is that, right? We recognize the ludicrous nature of that situation and that is why God gave it to Jeremiah. He says, 'Look guys, you are turning to your own pleasures, to your own things that you think will bring you satisfaction, those muddy water cisterns that can't bring any life and you've turned away from me, the fountain of living water.' That's what we do when we pursue the pleasure of sin. We regard it and its pleasure as of greater value than Jesus and the pleasure we find in Him. I love the quote by C.S. Lewis in "The Weight of Glory." It's often quoted, you've probably seen it before, but Lewis says, "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." Seek the things that are above.

And then he says, "Set your mind on things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth." Verse 2, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory." So, let's see what He says here. He says, "for you have died," now does that bring a red flag up to you as you look at this text? "For you have died." Paul, you've just told me that we've been raised with Christ. Now you're telling us we died? What's up? You can't be raised to life and dead at the same time, can you? Well yeah, I guess so. Remember, he's talking to followers of Jesus. He's talking to Christians. How do we fight against that former nature of sin? That which we have died to? You see, the believer looking back at their sinful natures sees that they were brought to life first, and because of that new life that is in them, they have died to former things. So, first life, and then death. You have been given life to experience so much more joy and purpose than what you knew before.

And then he makes an interesting statement, he says, "Christ who is your life." Now what does he mean when he says, "Christ, who is your life"? It means that Christ, Himself, is the essence of the Christian's life. See, the text draws our attention to the coming day when we will experience Christ's return, and our life that will begin, truly begin, in that moment and last for eternity. He says, right now you have a sense of the presence of Christ but everything it seems is still hidden to you. You don't see it very much. We don't experience everything now that we will experience in heaven, but I would suggest to you that in a sense we do. Think about it.

What will be true of your life in heaven? Explore it a little bit in your mind with me. What will be true? Well, we know first of all that you'll live forever, right? That's true. What else? You'll see Jesus face to face and all at once you'll have a comprehensive knowledge of who He is and His beauty and His glory. You're going to see that, face to face. You will be transformed from this sinful person, this sinful being, into a holy one, sinless and holy. You will be like Him, perfectly conformed to His image, and you will spend all of eternity worshipping, right? We will worship Him, seeing His glory. Our affection will only grow. We will experience joy and happiness and pleasure like we have never known before and it will be never ending forever and ever. It will continue to grow forever and ever, and we will never ever experience any more need or want. That we know about heaven.

So, let's pull back now and say, right now, in light of that coming day, what is true in your life right now? What is true? Let me ask you some questions: have you been granted eternal life now? Yeah! Right? The moment you trusted in Christ you were granted eternal life. Now your understanding is limited of what eternal life means, but you know that you have it, right? Can you commune with Jesus right now? Yeah. It's kind of what prayer is about, right? It's

limited. You can't see Him very clearly, but you can! Do you find Jesus lovely and beautiful now? Yeah, if you're a Christian you do. It's always like what Paul says, looking through a looking glass darkly. It's kind of dim and faded, but you do find Him lovely! Are you growing in your faith? Yeah! You are. Slowly, but you are! Do you find joy in worshipping? When Charlie and his team lead us in worship, is there something within your heart that says, "Yes!"

Okay. So do you see what I'm saying that these things that are true about us, that will ultimately be true in heaven, these characteristics about our existence, most of them are here right now, just really, really limited. They're hidden from us, although true. We experience bites and morsels of the banquet that we'll experience in heaven. So, the means by which we combat sin and temptation is to reflect upon the reality of who Jesus is and what is ours and who we are. That's how you combat it. You combat the longing for the pleasure that sin brings with the far greater pleasure of the glory of Jesus. He is the one that brings joy and meaning to my life. Knowing His presence becomes the driving force for my happiness and well-being. The pursuit of my joy solely in Him will strip away the desires for anything that is not Him. It is in the pursuit of greater joy that I find I can turn away from the Mardi Gras beads to the pearl of great price.

Listen to 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," listen, "because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure." John says there's still a great deal of mystery about what we will be like in heaven, but we do know we will be like Him because the first time we see Him, we will be transformed, because we'll see and have a full understanding of who He is, the beauty and the glory of Jesus. We're going to see Him face to face. It is seeing Him face to face that transforms us. Seeing His beauty wrecks everything else. John says because we have that hope, we seek to purify ourselves on this side. We get a head start on the process. Our longing to see Him and find our pleasure and joy and sense of purpose in Him will lead to our purity. It's the same point that Paul makes. The reason we are not like Him now is that we have a limited, skewed view of who He is. So, the overwhelming pursuit of our heart must be to see Jesus more clearly and to love Him more deeply.

In the battle against sin and the flesh, Paul calls us, not primarily to action, not primarily to do this and you'll be okay, primarily he calls us to think rightly. Understand that you died with Him, that you were risen with Him, that you are hidden in Him, and that you will appear with Him one day. And the more we can grasp that truth, the more we will be weaned from the things that are not congruent to that future. When we set our minds and affections upon Jesus Christ, that will determine the direction of our life. So, do you have those sins that so easily entangle you? That you've tried and you've tried and you've tried and you just can't seem to let them go? If you would abandon sin, and the sin that so easily entangles you, the greatest effort of your life needs to be to explore and to think and to seek to understand what is true about Jesus. That's at the heart. The battle is about rightly treasuring Jesus. Let's pray.