

- ¹ *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ,
set your hearts on things above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*
- ² *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*
- ³ *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*
- ⁴ *When Christ, who is your life, appears,
then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Introduction

Listen to Jacob,

a young man in his early twenties.
He's been brought up in a Christian home
and has attended church for most of his life.

Jacob: hi Dad "Brian,"
"what does it mean to be a Christian?"

Brian: "Oh!"
"It means you ask Jesus into your heart."

Jacob: "Yes, all right, but what does that mean?"

Brian: "It means that you ask Jesus to forgive you."

Jacob: "And after you've been forgiven,
what do you think God wants you to know?"

Brian: "He wants me to know that I should love myself
and there's nothing I can't do if I think I can."

Jacob: "And what does God want from you?"

Brian: "He wants me to do good stuff..
You know, be nice to others
and don't hang around with bad people."

1. What is the good news or gospel?

So there it is! The Christian life is about being nice and not hanging around with bad people. In other words, Christianity is all about being good, at least outwardly. Now there's nothing wrong with trying to be good. It's better than the opposite, going down a track of harm and destruction.

The trouble is we Christians claim to have a gospel, gospel meaning "good news" and "be good" is not good news. In fact it's not even news. "Be good" has been around for ever.

- Parents have always said it: "Don't tell lies. Stop teasing your sister. Keep your room tidy. Be good, be good."

- Teachers say it: “Don’t cheat. Don’t do drugs. Make sure you do your homework. Be good.”
- Doctors say it: “Watch your diet. Cut down on the sugar. Do more exercise. Be good.”
- The Government says it: Quit smoking. Don’t drink and drive. Domestic violence is not OK. Be good.

And not only is “*be good*” not news. Remember the harshest words Jesus ever used were for the Pharisees, people who tried desperately to be good, to do the right thing and follow the rules exactly. Jesus blasted the Pharisees. “*Hypocrites! Blind Guides! Snakes!*” he called them. “*Tax-collectors and prostitutes, people with the worst of track records, go into the kingdom of God before you lot.*”

And think about it. If all Christianity has to say is “*be good*”, who needs Jesus? From Confucius in China, to the Buddha in Burma, to Mahatma Gandhi in India, any teacher of morals will say that.

And if being good is all that matters why does Jesus have to get nailed to a cross? You don’t get crucified for telling people to be good. No and no, and no again! The Christian life doesn’t start with our being good.

2. How does the Christian life start?

The Christian life starts with something else altogether. It starts with death. Look at verse 3. “*For you died.*” This death happened in our baptism. Don’t you know, says Paul in Romans (6.3) “*don’t you know that all of who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death.*”

By our baptism then, we died with Christ. But that wasn’t the end. Just as we shared the death of Christ so too we share in his resurrection. Look at verse 1. “*Since you have been raised with Christ.*” We often think of salvation in terms of having faith and belief, accepting Jesus into our life and praying in our hearts.

We do all those things, but the problem with that is we miss the key component of salvation. Salvation is not just adding Jesus into your existence into whom you are, and hoping things will change. No, salvation is that you died, so your old life is gone, and so you have been resurrected or you have been born into a new life with Christ.

It’s just not added into your life because you are no longer exist and now you have been born again into a child of God, you have been resurrected as a son or a daughter of God. That’s why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.* It doesn’t say if you are in Christ, you go to heaven or go somewhere.

No, it says you are a new creation, the old and dead has gone away and the new has come. So, we need to understand what has happened to us. We died but now we have been raised with Christ.

3. What does the real Christian life mean?

And what this means is that our real life is now Christ. Verse 4: *“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.”* We now live in a new life with assurance, confidence and strength. We still have this body, this flesh and this battle. We still have enemies, pain, sickness and death but we have received a new life. We are alive in Christ. So we don’t have to worry who we are or where we are or what we do. If we are in Christ who is our rock or shelter, so he will protect us in any temptations.

In the words of Psalm 27:5,

*“For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.”*

We know that we have the promise of security, because our life is hidden with Christ in God. We have a new life right now through the Holy Spirit. So although we still struggle with this body, this flesh and with this fallen world, verse 4 assures us that not only will Christ will come again but that when he comes again in glory because he is our life, we will appear with him and share in his glory.

4. What tasks do we need to do as Christians?

Therefore, because we are now in Christ, we have a task to do. Here it is.

In verse 1 *“Set your hearts on things above,*

where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God”

In verse 2 *“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”*

I’m sure many of you have heard the phrase,

“if people are so heavenly minded, they are of no earthly good.”

But here, Paul insists that

*“it’s only if you are heavenly minded
that you will be of any earthly good.”*

What are the things “above” the things we are to set our hearts on?

In another of his letters Paul actually give us a list. “Brother and sisters, he says *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things*”(Philippians 4:8).

We who have died with Christ and been raised with him are to set our mind on things that are noble, true and right. These are things that will last into eternity, and prepare us for the kingdom that is to come. On the other hand, we are not set our minds on things of the earth. In the end the things of this earth will disappear. If we make them our focus they will not last.

One such thing of earth is anger. Before someone is a Christian, they struggle to control their anger. However, once they have become a Christian and been baptized into Christ's death, they have 'put to death' their anger. They are now alive to God and through the power of God, they can control their anger. Anger is a part of their old self which is now dead and buried.

The old self, the old life is no longer with them because they are now free from sin, and free to live in a new life without anger. The one who wants to fight back is dead, so they don't have to react in their old way and they can now choose how to react.

Does that mean they will no longer feel angry? No, sometimes, they still will feel anger but they can choose now how they react and they can offer their body as a servant of righteousness. Therefore, they can live in a new life with Christ without being a slave to anger. Because Christ has power over sin, he can change hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, we now understand:

- 1. The gospel is the good news of Christ.**
- 2. The Christian life starts with our death in Christ.**
- 3. The real Christian life is lived in, with and for Christ.**
- 4. True Christians need to set their mind and heart on things above that are noble, true and right.**

As Christians, the message we preach is not be good. Being good is what thousands of other voices tell us. Our message is not to be good. Our message is Christ - the good news of Christ. Christ died and Christ rose again. In baptism, we die with Christ. In baptism, we have been raised with Him. Our true life is now in Christ and we, therefore, set our hearts on things above. In doing that, when Christ appears, we also will appear with Him in glory.

In some ways it all comes down to whether we want to live a life based in rules or live in vital relationship with God. Those of you who are married or have close friends will know what I mean. If you only perform the rules that you think will make the other person happy then it can be a pretty sad kind of friendship, but if **you** love someone and serve them the best you can, they'll get it and understand. You all are married to Christ. You have new life in Him. Let's start from there!