



# Heavenly Minded

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# Contents

## **Part 1: The Need to Be Heavenly Minded**

The Call 13

The Challenge 19

## **Part 2: The Case for Being Heavenly Minded**

We Are Fit for Heaven 31

Our Savior Is in Heaven 37

We Are Going to Heaven 45

Questions for Discussion and Reflection 55



PART 1:

*The Need to Be  
Heavenly Minded*



## The Call

It seems odd to suggest that in order for people to live meaningful and productive lives on earth, they must focus on other-worldly things. But that's precisely what the Bible teaches.

The Bible is written largely for believers—believers like you and me who struggle with many trials and tribulations here on earth. It's only natural for human beings, living in this world, to be thinking about things in this world. It's normal that we give thought to our physical and emotional health, our appearance, our possessions, our relationships, our occupations, our failures, our successes. To manage them well, we have to think about them! But the Bible

consistently tells believers that worldly things can't be our priority. We must concern ourselves less with money, careers, politics, and sport—they can't be our main focus in life. We must concern ourselves more with our Savior, our identity and our final destination. Only then will we gain true joy, peace and hope. Heavenly mindedness, rather than worldly mindedness, is key to the Christian life.

There are many places where Scripture stresses the necessity of heavenly mindedness. One of the more famous passages is found in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae. In Colossians 3:1–4, he writes:

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

Paul urges us to cultivate this heavenly mindedness in our lives. It is vital. It combats joy-sapping fear.

It heals Christ-dishonoring divisions. It undercuts soul-crushing doubts. And who doesn't want that?

"Jesus plus"

Have you ever been part of a local church in crisis? Serious troubles plagued the young Colossian church. Paul had never met these Christians face to face, but he was deeply concerned for them. Some in this local congregation had come to believe the secret to spiritual growth was to be found, not in Christ, but in mystical religious practices and rigorous self-discipline. Paul was distressed! So distressed, in fact, that he wrote them a letter from prison.

Paul most likely caught wind of these troubles from his ministry partner, Epaphras (see Phlm. 23). It was Epaphras who first proclaimed the gospel in his home town of Colossae (Col. 1:7–8; 4:12). And it was Epaphras who seems to have heard that a group of false teachers had infiltrated that congregation and caused divisions among them (Col. 2:16–19).

These false teachers claimed that for believers to mature and experience spiritual satisfaction, they needed to add to the simple gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They promoted a sort of

“Jesus plus” religion, arguing that, *in addition to trusting in Jesus Christ*, Christians should strive for super-spiritual “wisdom” and commit to certain religious regimens, such as treating their bodies harshly (Col. 2:16–23). You can visualize their understanding of true spiritual life as a pie chart: rather than comprising the whole pie, Jesus and his gospel contributed only one part, even if a large part.

In essence, these false teachers were claiming that their “Jesus plus” program was the key to true spiritual maturity. They intended to promote it and so take the Colossian congregation captive by worldly priorities and methods (Col. 2:8, 23), rather than heavenly ones.

Sound familiar? It’s a chronic temptation of the church in every generation to distort the gospel with some form of “Jesus plus” religion. A simple perusal of hot-topic debates among believers on social media illustrates these tendencies. We emphasize choice issues in a manner that sets them up as a litmus test for “authentic” or “mature” faith, and then we cancel anyone who fails our test. “I can’t imagine that a *real* Christian could ever vote for *that* political party,” we sometimes say. “How could a genuine believer not make

## The Call

*such-and-such* social issue their main priority?” Or, “How could a proper Christian go to *that* church or hold *that* opinion?”

Even when we might score 100% on a doctrine quiz, our “Jesus plus” attitudes and actions betray what we actually believe: that Christianity is *really* about following a set of moral rules, belonging to a particular church tribe, achieving certain life goals, or advocating for the right social cause (or avoiding *any* apparent support for *any* social cause). With this sort of in-or-out, hierarchal attitude, we inevitably create a religious “caste” system. We each can end up passing judgment on other believers who don’t adhere to our chosen priorities in the precise way we demand. None of us is immune to being deceived by a “Jesus plus” mindset.

The call to cultivate heavenly mindedness comes to us smack-dab in the middle of such temptations. So, if we’re to answer that call, we’ve got no alternative but to face up to the challenge it brings.