

Thinking and Living with a Heavenly Mindset

Colossians 3:1-11

By Chris Brown

Good evening. It's my pleasure to bring God's Word this evening. Today we are going to be in Colossians 3 so if you have your Bibles would you turn with me there? To Colossians 3 - and we're going to look at verses 1 through 11 as we continue our study. Now before we read God's Word let's go to Him in prayer.

Our dear God, we thank You so much for the Gospel of truth. We thank You for the good news that You raised Jesus from the dead and that He's ascended into heaven and that right now He intercedes for us, that He stands with the marks of the nail wounds in His hands; He can say that He gave His life for us. And so we ask You to fulfill Your promises, that Your Spirit would be at work in us helping us to understand what You would have us do and what You would say to the church. We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.

So Colossians 3:

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.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Amen. This ends our reading of God's Word.

Thinking from a New Perspective

Today, as we come to this passage, we're being asked to think about things from a different perspective, from a different realm even. In 1884, Edwin Abbot published a small novella, it's pretty much unheard of; it's called *Flatland* and it's a satire about the nature of hierarchy in his culture. And in the story, the narrator is a square, literally a square. He's a square that lives in a two-dimensional world called Flatland. And in a dream one day, he visits a one-dimensional world called Lineland and he tries to persuade the king of this world that there's another world beyond his own. And here's what he ends up concluding after his attempt. He says, "It seemed that this poor, ignorant monarch as he called himself was persuaded that the straight line, which he called his kingdom and in which he passed his existence, constituted the whole of the world and indeed the whole of space. Not being able either to move or to see save in his straight line, he had no conception of anything out of it. Outside his world or line, all was blank to him. Nay, not even a blank; rather all was nonexistent." So in our passage today, again, we're being called to something like this. We're being called to think outside a normal perspective. We're called to look at ourselves from another dimension, another world. Paul's calling us to remember our true home and calling in Christ and in light of that to think and to live as if our home is in another place. So in light of that then, let's dig into God's Word and we'll see two things that Paul wants us to do. He wants us first to cultivate a heavenly mindset and second, he wants us to destroy what earthly remnants remain.

I. The Heavenly Mindset We Ought to Cultivate

So first, the heavenly mindset we ought to cultivate. That's in verses 1 to 4.

The Command

So first we'll see the command. That's in verse 1. He says, "If then you have been raised with Christ" - and honestly we could discuss that opening phrase for the entire evening tonight. That's such a wonderful phrase. But don't worry, we won't! Let's take a look at it though. It says, "If then" - it's a contingent statement. Paul's saying not everyone can claim this about themselves. It ought to make us wonder right off the bat, "Is what he's about to say true of myself?" But he goes on. He says, "You have been raised." So he's talking about an action that's already happened; it's already completed. It's something which you remain passive. It's like the phrase, "You've been had," today or, "Somebody duped you." But in this case it's, "You've been raised." Someone raised you.

Why? How? Well as we keep going we'll see. He says, "with Christ." That should startle us. He's saying when Christ was raised from the dead 2,000 years ago, we were raised from the dead. How is this possible? That's a shocking statement. And Paul doesn't explain it in this passage in particular but he's

discussed it. If you remember previously in 2:12, if you look back there you can see what it says. He says, "Having been buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith." When Christ was raised, He was raised in a glorified body and He was the beginning of the new creation. If you look back at 1:18 it talks about Him as the "firstborn from the dead." By faith, Paul's saying that we become part of that new creation spiritually and so he's saying right at the beginning our home is with Christ then; it's in a new creation now.

So that's why he can go on and say the next thing. Look at what he says next. "Seek the things that are above." Paul isn't telling us to seek out the things that we don't possess yet. One commentator noted we already possess these things. We're being asked to seek things out that we already have, in some sense; they already belong to us. He wants us to orient our thinking about the realities we've obtained through faith in Jesus.

And then one more command he gives. If you skip down to the beginning of verse 2 look at what he says. "Set your minds on the things that are above." So he's concerned about the habit of the mind. That's really what's going on here. What do we generally think about and how do we think about it? He wants us to develop and train our minds for this way of thinking. My undergraduate degree is in visual art and so I can say that an artist ought to have a certain goal and the goal of the artist typically is to communicate truth. It's to draw out meaning of something that isn't necessarily apparent to everyone but you want to bring it out for them. And because of that, artists will spend a long time learning simply how to draw something, learning how to see something. And one man that our professor made us read over and over again was a man named Nicolaidis. And he said this. He said, "There's only one right way to learn to draw and that's a perfectly natural way. It has only to do with the act of observation. If the student misses this step and does not practice it for at least his first five years, he has wasted most of his time and he must necessarily go back and begin all over again." And so this terrified us, of course. We were like, "We don't want to mess up! This is probably what we're going to end up doing for the rest of our lives!" But the point is this, though, for us - the artist labors to train the eyes to see something so he can show us what's really going on. But Paul's telling us to do something similar with our minds. He saying, "Work. Train your mind to think about what matters most - eternal life with Christ. All the things Christ has acquired for us. If you do not make a practice of it you have wasted not only most of your time but your life." That's what he's saying. So we get the command here - cultivate a heavenly mindset.

The Content of the Command

But then we get the content of that command. Now we get the content. Look at the end of verse 1 - "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." And then at the end of verse 2 - "not on things that are on the earth." And actually I have probably spent way too much time on that first point so I'm going to need to be

quick here. If you want a really good idea about this then you should take a look at Jeremiah Burrough's *A Treatise on Earthly-mindedness*. And he goes into a lot of detail that we won't go into tonight but basically Paul is saying that the things we ought to think about are totally different than the things that false teachers will tell you to think about. If you remember the context, he's been explaining, "Don't listen to what the false teachers have said. They are in the world; they haven't put their faith in Christ and been raised with Him. You are of a different realm now." And so he's now saying, "The false teachers will be telling you to think about things that are totally different." Just look back at 2:23 if you see it. Look at what he tells them to do. He says the false teachers tell them to do things like malnourish themselves, worship angels, try to have visions. And Paul's saying those things are not worth thinking about at all.

People spend tons of time thinking about what they need to do to get into heaven. I have a friend who converted to Judaism and I remember one day watching him. He ordered, it's called the *tefillin*; it's these black straps that they wrap around the arms, around their head, and there's a black box and they put a Scripture verse in the center of it. And I watched him wrap his arms, wrap it around his head, and there's a method that they've learned on how to do it, and then sit and rock back and forth and mutter certain passages under his breath. And he thought that somehow by doing these things would make him holy in God's sight, that God would be pleased with things like that. But this is a manmade method. That's a good example. People spend lots of time thinking up methods on how to get into heaven. But what Paul's saying is, "Instead of spending your time thinking about this, spend your time thinking about what Christ has done to make us a member of His family and His kingdom."

The Motivation for the Command

So Paul gives us a command and then he gives us the content and now he's going to give us the motivation to do it. Look at verse 3. He says, "for you have died." You have died. And it sounds a lot like something he said earlier in 2:20 - "for if with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of this world." He's saying the old nature, your old nature couldn't heal itself. It was concerned with all sorts of manmade remedies and earthly potions. It was ever seeking life but it was never finding it. It was the thing that developed methods to try and please God. But he's saying that old nature is dead. You died. It's a bold statement. But then he moves on. He doesn't say it's not just that you died; look at what he says next in verse 3. "And your life is hidden with Christ in God." So it's sort of a paradox. If we've died, how can we be alive? Where's the source of our life? And he's saying the source of our life is hidden. You can't see it. We used to think that things in this world that were present before our eyesight could give us the life we so desired but now our true life is hidden away. And he says where - where is it? It is with Christ in God. And though our life's currently hidden away, he says one day we will see it.

Look at what he says next in verse 4. "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." So he's saying right now our spiritual life only is in Jesus and the world can't see that; the world can't see that. When they look at us they see a bunch of people growing old and dying just like the rest of the world. And they're saying, "How are you people any different than us?" But Paul says, "Though our outer man is wasting away our inner man is being renewed day by day." And what we learn in this phrase right here in verse 4 is that when Christ returns we will come with Him in glory. Remember the High Priestly prayer in John's gospel? At the end Jesus prays this, He says, "Father, the glory that you've given to me I have given to them. I desire that they also, whom you have given to me, may be with me where I am that they may see my glory."

When Jesus wanted to illustrate this concept in His own earthly ministry He used two parables. He used the parable of the man who buys the field and He used the parable of the merchant who buys the pearl. Do you remember them? The man stumbles on the hidden treasure in the field and in his joy he covers up the treasure, he goes back, he sells everything he has and he buys the field. And it's the same with the merchant. The merchant has been searching and searching for a pearl of great worth and he finds it and in his joy he sells everything he has just to own this pearl. This is what Paul is saying. Our life, the King of God's kingdom, He's worth everything. And He's hidden away right now like the treasure in the field, but we are to give away everything to have Him, place our faith in Him. When we find our treasure we forsake the world and all that's in it to trust Him.

Considerations and Challenges for the Citizens of God's Kingdom

So then we have to ask ourselves some questions. "What prevents us from heavenly-mindedness? What makes us think like this world is our home? Is it comfort or is it luxury?" Remember what Paul says to the church in Philippi. He gives a description of people who set their mind on earthly things and he says, "their god is their belly and their end is destruction." So does comfort keep you from heavenly-mindedness? What about a woman or a man or a job or a school? Or what about doubt? Maybe you're under the constant murmurings of the lie; you feel that God doesn't love you even though you do believe the promise but fight to speak truth to yourself. We have an example of Abel and Enoch, or Noah and Abraham. The author of Hebrews talks about this in Hebrews 11. He says, "they desired a heavenly country. They never saw the land itself but they trusted in God's promise." And then the author of Hebrews says, "because they believed God is not ashamed to be called their God because He has prepared for them a city." And so that's what it is to have a heavenly mindset, to fight to consistently think on what Jesus has promised to you to be received by faith. One of the hymns we sang this last Sunday at Twin Lakes, it looks like what a person who is in despair, how they ought to shape their mind to think on heavenly things. It says, "When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I

look and see Him there who made an end to all my sin.” And then later on they say, “My life is hid with Christ on high.” So Paul’s shown us the heavenly mindset that we ought to cultivate.

II. The Earthly Remnants We Ought to Destroy

But next in verses 5 to 11 he’s going to show us the earthly remnant we ought to destroy. The earthly remnants we ought to destroy.

The Command

And so again he gives the command verse. Look at verse 5. He says, “Put to death therefore what’s earthly in you.” And we could translate this a different way. When he says earthly he’s saying, “Your members that are on the earth; your body parts that are on the earth.” And he’s not talking about your physical body but he’s giving us a blatant, kind of hard image. He’s kind of saying, “You need to kill some of your internal organs that have gone bad.” Like you have an appendix that’s dying and you need to get rid of it. That’s what Paul’s telling you to do. He’s telling you to cut it off. And so a good question that we might have is, “Well how are there things left to kill if we’ve already died?” That’s a good question for the Christian. If we’ve been given a new nature by God’s Spirit, we’re inhabitants of a new realm, we’re told yes, but it’s like we’ve carried some of the old organs with us. The throne of our heart is ruled by a new king but the old master lurks nearby like Gríma Wormtongue in *Lord of the Rings* and he’s seeking to poison us with bad counsel. So he’s telling us to fight, to not listen to that counsel. And again look at the command in verse 8. He says it again. He says, “Now you must put them all away.” And that is a different image. It’s like taking off clothing and putting it away; getting rid of it. And also in their culture that was used to talk about taking the ashes of a cremated person and putting them into the earth to bury them. So he’s saying you’ve killed the organ now go bury it and don’t think about it anymore. Get rid of it entirely.

The Content of the Command

So how do we do it? That might be your question now. And before we can answer that we have to look at the content. What exactly is it that’s earthly? If we have a heavenly calling, what is it that’s earthly that remains in us? And Paul gives us two lists; they’re big lists. If you look at verse 5 he says, sexual immorality - that’s kind of obvious; unfaithfulness to God and to your spouse. Impurity - that’s a corruption of your conscience by repeated immoral living. Passion - which is over desire, evil desire. So not just over desire but desire for what’s wicked or wrong. And covetousness. And Paul defines that himself. He say covetousness is idolatry. Notice that all of these things in this list are rooted in misplaced or misused desire. They flow from and the result in the worship of creaturely things. And then he gives us another list. It’s similar. But there are

important differences. It's in verse 8 to 9 - anger, wrath, malice. All three of these are really similar but each of them kind of build on the next one. Wrath; it could also be called fury. It's anger that's built up and it bursts out. And then malice. People have said that's the worst of the three because it includes an intention, intentionally to do something wicked and cruel to someone else. But then as we keep going - slander and obscene talk from your mouth. And then he says "Do not lie to one another." In Scripture, Satan is attributed with being the one who slanders and lies and who's intent on murder. So these sort of things, Paul's saying, he's saying they're under the sway of Satan. They're under his world and rule. You're not to live like that sort of a person. Since we're no longer under his power we ought to resist the temptation to go back.

So then how do we do it though? That's the question we keep coming to. How do we do this? What do we do? And first I'll tell you how not to do it, how not to do it. Jerome. He's an early church father and he lived in the 300s and he was heavily influenced by monasticism and he thought that self-abuse would remove, as Paul was saying, what's earthly inside of you. But listen to what Jerome says after his experiences are over and after he has time to look back on them. He says, "How often, when I was in the desert and in that vast solitude which is scorched by the sun's heat did I think myself amid the delights of Rome. I would sit alone because I was filled with bitterness. My limbs were roughly clad in sackcloth; an unlovely sight. My neglected skin had taken on the appearance of an Ethiopian's body. Daily I wept; daily I groaned. There I was, who from fear of hell had condemned myself to such a prison with only scorpions and wild beasts as companions. Yet I was often surrounded by dancing girls. My face was pale from fasting but my mind was hot with desire in a body cold as ice. Though my flesh was already good as dead, the fires of the passions kept boiling away within me." Sounds like a tempting life, huh?

But really, Paul doesn't tell us in this passage how to do what he commands. He doesn't tell us here. But he does tell us in a lot of other passages basically what we need to do to kill the deeds of the flesh. And it's by fighting against temptation, just temptation itself. You kill something by depriving it of life. That's how you kill sin. You do whatever it takes to keep yourself from temptation. I'm heavily influenced by John Owen on this. John Owen, if we can't go much further into it you guys should read *The Mortification of Sin* by John Owen. And he basically says the first thing you need to do is flee temptation. Christ's prayer, the Lord's Prayer, He says deliver us from temptation, from the evil one. Keep us from temptation. And His prayer in the garden was to be kept from temptation. Once you're in it, it's a whole other level. It's a whole other level of danger. So again, I can't go much further into it, but flee temptation. That's the beginning.

The Motivation for the Command

So he's given the command and we're given the content but then he gives us a motivation. Why should we put this stuff to death? Why should we do it? It

sounds like a lot of work; it sounds complicated. We've got to read books about it. Why should we put it to death? He gives us motivation. Look at verse 6. He says, "On account of these the wrath of God is coming." So that's one reason - fear. That's a good motivation. Don't behave this way because this behavior is why God is going to come to judge the world. But he doesn't leave it there, thankfully. He goes on. Look at verse 7. He says, "in these you too once walked when you were living in them." And this might remind us of a passage in Ephesians when he says, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. But God..." That's what he says in Ephesians 2. And here Paul does it again. He wants us to destroy - I guess "earthly remnants" is a good phrase - earthly remnants in us because they're part of the former world that we once inhabited. Sin shouldn't be a friend to us anymore. It shouldn't come and spend time in our house. Now it's an enemy that we ought to chase off of our property with a weapon of some sort.

And then he gives another motivation; the last motivation. Verses 9 to 11; this whole thing. He says, "Seeing that you put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all." And so he goes through some of the same old terminology again. He says, "put off." That's the clothing image again. "Put off the old self, the old nature," that's what he's saying - the nature that you had before you were regenerate. But now we have a new nature that we're given by the Spirit of God. And the motivating thing about this is that our nature is being renewed and not just renewed but look at what he says. It's being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. And basically what that means is that we're being restored to the way we ought to be. We can know God; we can know Him in a way we couldn't before just intellectually but also intimately in a relationship. We couldn't before; now we're being renewed in our ability to do that. Paul's even saying that we can please God by the way we live now. That should motivate us to put to death all these things.

Implications Now for the Citizens of God's Kingdom

But then we're left with the final line. Look he says, here, here in the renewed image of God, in that image of God, "here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all." Paul's saying that there's nothing else that matters but being united to Jesus, of having Him as your representative and your first love because Jesus is the only resurrected and perfect human. He is the perfect image of God. If anyone at all is united to Him by faith that person is being made into Jesus' likeness. And so the restored image of God and man isn't based on a social class, an area of residence, an amount of income, or race, but upon whether or not you've been found in Christ. And isn't that great news? That should motivate

us because Jesus isn't just for the Jew; He's for me. He's for a Gentile. I am a Gentile. We are Gentiles. Jesus is for us. We're Americans; we're lost in materialism and prosperity. We were lost until Christ came to claim us for His own. So why should we not fight to remove the filth that remains.

So as we come to our conclusion, Paul leaves us on a note that has some major implications about how we view one another. What makes a person worthwhile? We can't think the way the world thinks about race or money. As we leave this passage tonight, Paul's pleading with us. He says, "Get rid of the earthly ways that are left in you. You need to examine your hearts to know what you still flirt with. Examine your mind and train yourself to think about God's kingdom and to think about His righteousness. Think the way that you really are now - a citizen of God's kingdom along with fellow citizens who are being renewed after the image of Jesus." So may God give us His grace to set our minds on things that are above and to put to death the earthly things that remain. Let's pray.

Our dear God, we thank You so much for the Gospel of Jesus that You didn't leave us in a state of sin and misery but that You sent Christ to be perfectly obedient, to lay down His life as a ransom for many, to purchase us from our wayward ways, and You constitute in Him as the true human, the new man, the second Adam, and that by faith in Him nothing matters but the new creation. We pray that You would help us to live as members of Your kingdom, thinking eternal thoughts, heavenly thoughts, things related to our true habitation of the new heavens and the new earth that is to come. We pray that You would help us by Your Spirit to put to death all these things that so easily overcome us. We pray that You would help us. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, amen.

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