

“Heavenly Mindfulness Results in Earthly Goodness”

Colossians 3:1-17

We’ve probably all heard the phrase ‘He/she is so heavenly minded they are no earthly good.’ We know what people mean by that. It means someone is so religious they are disconnected to the needs of people and the world around them. Unfortunately we’ve probably witnessed this of someone who seemed to be all about the gospel or all about Jesus yet at the same time abrasive, insulting or insensitive to the genuine needs of those they are supposedly trying to reach.

The phrase really isn’t true because if you are genuinely heavenly minded than you are focused on God and His Word and how it changes the way you live. Think of people like William Wilberforce whose love for God resulted in loving slaves as God sees them and fighting his life for their freedom. Or George Mueller whose love for God resulted in loving orphans and unwanted children and building orphanages and teaching them God’s truths while feeding them and clothing them.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “If you read history you will find that Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next”.

And we see this all over Scripture. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love neighbours as yourself. If I genuinely love God (vertical) it will result in love and practical actions toward people (horizontal). The apostle Paul talks about heavenly mindfulness in Col. 3:1-4

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.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature

So Paul says be heavenly minded so you can do earthly good. Our theme this year is “Things Above” because we want to know God more and what our salvation has done for us so we can be the most godly, earthly good people who can make a real difference for God in our homes, church, communities and world. [pray]

Vv.1-4 is Paul’s general command; setting our hearts and minds above = what we have already guaranteed for us in heaven, and vv.5-17 is how that should affect the way we interact with people now. So Paul very clearly tells us that heavenly mindfulness results in earthly goodness or

Future Hope Affects Present Behaviour **(3:1-4)**

We see this clearly from the opposite perspective. Most of the world has no future hope so they just live for them-selves, for the moment and some don’t care how they treat people. Paul says that’s not the way God’s people should live. He repeats the command and speaks of both our hearts and minds (which combine our passions and our wills). “Things above” are in contrast to things on earth. Obviously we need things on earth (as everyone does) because this is where we live but Paul is saying this isn’t our focus, our priority. So his command to us as disciples of Jesus is

Choose God’s priorities more than your own (vv.1-2)

Why? Because we have already been raised with Christ.

Where is Jesus? Seated at the right hand of God. How did He get there? He became Immanuel (God with us), took on humanity, suffered and died for our sins but was victorious over death and sin and was raised from the dead. His reward is in the presence of God where (we learned a few weeks ago) He lives to intercede for us.

And Jesus' resurrection guarantees our own, that's why we're already seated at the right hand of God too. Our future is secure. If our future is secure then our present must be secure because Jesus is keeping us saved too.

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.
(1 Pet. 1:3-5)

Even though we experience trials and difficulties we can get through them because we're already seated with Jesus at the right hand of God. "Things above" refers to anything that our salvation has procured for us. As well as God's plans and purposes for us. What God wants for us and His desire for us to be more like Christ. That's His goal for us to be more like His Son. And our being seated with Christ,

Our security frees us to live for Christ (vv.3-4)

We don't have to earn our salvation. We don't have to impress God. He secures our salvation so we are free to focus on just living it out day by day.

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.

Coming to Jesus requires dying to self. Yet we're really alive now! In 2:13 Paul said of our pre-salvation life,

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

When Jesus returns we'll be with Him and people will see us as for who we will always be. This all sounds wonderful and exciting but a little fuzzy too. So, if all these things are true what does this 'setting my mind on things above' life look now on earth?

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature

And then he elaborates on this more specifically. Jesus disarmed the evil powers at the cross. Jesus was victorious over sin at the cross. If we've placed our faith in Jesus our victory over death (sin's penalty) is already secured over sin. Here's where it gets practical. If this is actually true right now then

Ultimate Victory Over Sin Should Result in Increasing Victories Over Sin (3:5-14)

'Put to death therefore' the things you've already guaranteed victory over. Like,

sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices

What a lovely list of sins that Paul commands Christians to put to death! The very things that will incur the wrath of God on unbelievers. The very sins that Jesus died for, we sometimes still engage in. Sadly, a number of these are sexual sins. Christians engage in sex outside marriage (before, during), get involved with pornography and at the very least allow their minds to enjoy lustful thoughts.

And then there's the words that come out of our mouths. Angry words, inappropriate words and lying. Paul is talking to believers here. If we're already saved from these sins, why do engage in them? We know better, we should do better. This is what it means to set our minds on things above. If I'll never say and do these things for all eternity and Jesus has given me power to have victory over sin now, why do I do them? So Paul uses drastic language; put to death, get rid, take off old clothes.

Trash the sins of an unsaved life (vv.5-9)

Paul uses the put off old clothes put on new clothes analogy a few times in his letters. What we don't get in our comfortable 21st century 1st world lifestyle who have lots of clothes is Paul is saying get rid of that one cloak that you've quite comfortable with but have been wearing too long and is very dirty and you need a new one. Yes, it will cost you but you'll feel a lot better. You only had one or two garments so this is a major change.

What's the image for our heavenly attire?

⁶ *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.*

⁷ *Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.*

⁸ *Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."*

Everything in eternity will be new and it will stay new. Think about that from a 1st century perspective in which you rarely received anything new and that you clung to your old, well-worn, stained cloak. Paul is saying if you're a child of God who will be victorious over the penalty of sin one day, why don't you show you have power over sin now? So think about these above things when you're tempted to act earthly. Why I am doing this? Why I am hurting another fellow Christian who I will spend all eternity with in perfect peace and harmony? Why do I harbor bitterness or resentment towards people who don't know they are sinners separated from God, who haven't received grace like we have? Set your mind on things above, not things on earth. Mind refers to attitude, thoughts, where anger and bitterness begins. When those thoughts start to come, stop it Paul says. Remember what's in store for you. Remember what the cross cost. Remember who you'll be in heaven with. Remember, you've been graced and many have not.

It's never enough to get rid of something without replacing it. So that's what Paul says next in vv.10-14,

put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let others experience the changes Jesus can make in you (vv.10-14; Titus 3:2)

I say experience because people need to receive our kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love. People are people. Colour, ethnicity, status; none of those things should separate people. We are all created by God. We are all marred images. No one is perfect. All have sinned. All deserve God's wrath. No one has an advantage to get into heaven. All by grace. We've been forgiven then we need to show forgiveness. There's no conditions given here or anywhere else in the Bible.

When we've experienced others' harsh words, unkindness, impatience, abrasiveness and unforgiveness we are to put on the characteristics of Jesus. A 'things above' attitude will realize one day I'll never have to experience any of this in eternity. We have power over these sins. We can help others see grace if set our minds on the sure promises of God.

Who mistreated you recently? Who has an unforgiving attitude toward you? Our responsibility is to let the 'things above' perspective that we know already to be true for us and ready for us, to change the way we respond now. How then do we develop and maintain that perspective so we can act Christ-like to the unsaved and fellow believers?

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

People will see and experience our present Jesus-like behavior inspired by our future hope which frees us to

Give Jesus Control of Your Life—Each Day (3:15-17)

Paul gives us 3 'hooks' that we can grab every day to Cling to again and again so we can live a Things above life.

Let His eternal peace bring peace to your mind (v.15)

What is the peace of Christ? The final rest that Jesus has finished His work on the cross and secured our salvation. When our peace is a rattled, His peace is not. Nothing happens to us outside His and His Father's sovereign control. Next week we'll talk more about this in Phil. 4:6-9 where we'll talk about being anxious and letting the peace of Christ rule our hearts.

Rule means ‘take charge’, is in control. Jesus is in control. When worried remember the peace already bought for you.

Let His Word change your words (v.16)

Let the Word take residence richly. Let it sink in daily. Dwelling on the Word changes the way we speak to one another when we’re together with believers (*teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, etc.*), it will certainly change the way we speak to and about everybody. When we’re in the Word of God and allowing it to live in us – meditating on it, memorizing it – God’s words will form our words to one another. If our speech is more harsh and complaining and blaming, we’re showing how little we let the Word of God dwell in us. The outside evidence gives away what’s happening on the inside.

All these commands are in the present tense. That means we are to keep doing them every day.

Let your actions show who you live for (v.17)

Doing something ‘in the name of Jesus’ means to do it in His authority or power or as if it’s about Him. So then the challenge for us is to look at everything we do and ask God, ‘Lord, how can I make this about Jesus somehow?’ If it’s sinful we won’t get an answer because we know we should stop doing that. But I think the real challenge here is to think about the basic things we do; work, raise a family, recreational activities – how can we glorify God or make them Christ-focused somehow. Do our basic actions in life demonstrate that we don’t live for the things on earth but are living for the things above, the hope we have in Jesus and all that it entails.

We will only scratch the surface about what “Things above” means. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2:9

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—

God tells us that our future is secure. Your forgiveness is complete. Your linen garment is white and ready. Your living place is already prepared. There’s a card with your name on it already at the Wedding banquet of the Lamb. Now, show the world how living with hope like that changes you.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please get back to us at olivvet@rideau.net