

The Things Above
Colossians 3:1-17
December 6, 2020

Have you ever heard the phrase, **“get your mind out of the gutter”**? - According to the Urban Dictionary it means to **stop thinking "dirty thoughts"** - **which are sexual or inappropriate thoughts.**

We have all heard someone make a PERFECTLY INNOCENT COMMENT and then someone starts laughing because they read a SEXUAL INNUENDO into the statement - At that moment, someone might say, **“Come on, get your mind out of the gutter!”**

Well, this morning, the Apostle Paul is going to say to all of us, **“Hey, Christian, get your mind out of the gutter!”** - This is what the first 17 verses of Colossians 3 is all about - Paul is about to ENCOURAGE US to change the way we think!

Paul rightly understood a VALUABLE TRUTH about human beings - **What we think the most about will eventually become our behavior!** - In other words, **where the mind goes, the body will eventually follow!**

The BATTLE for our BEHAVIOR ALWAYS BEGINS IN OUR MINDS! - Both GOD, Our Father, and Satan, our enemy, understand this truth - The problem is that WE DON'T understand it - We like to believe that we can think any way we want, and as long as it STAYS IN OUR HEADS, we are just fine!

Unfortunately, life does not work that way - DESTRUCTIVE THOUGHTS will eventually lead to DESTRUCTIVE ACTIONS - or as Jesus said in **Mat 15:18-19 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.**

Look at all these HORRIBLE ACTIONS - and Jesus says that they all FLOW FROM OUR HEART - In this context, our heart would be OUR THOUGHTS or our minds!

Here is the truth we are going to see today - I need to SET MY MIND on the right things - or as Paul will say, **“Set your mind on things above!”** - Let's begin reading in verse 1.

Col 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

In the first 2 Chapters of Colossians, Paul has been ARGUING FOR THE SUPREMACY of Christ - Jesus is both THE CREATOR & SUSTAINER of life - As Paul would write, He is **“the image of the invisible God”** - in other words, when we SEE JESUS, WE SEE GOD!

Paul would add that He is greater than any HUMAN PHILOSOPHY - He is more powerful than ANY LAW OR RELIGIOUS REGULATION - Only Jesus can make us RIGHT WITH GOD - Because He died and ROSE FROM the Dead - and we can be RAISED WITH HIM!

HEY, if you are a Christian this morning, you HAVE BEEN RAISED with Christ - and now, THOSE RISEN WITH HIM need to SEEK THOSE THINGS which are above - Now OUR THOUGHTS need to be the thoughts of Christ.

Yet, so often our minds are CONSUMED WITH things on the earth - Our minds have been RENEWED IN CHRIST - but unfortunately we continue to think AS WE HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT.

FOR THIS REASON, Paul is about to DRAW A CONTRAST between the THOUGHTS OF HEAVEN and the thoughts of earth - BETWEEN thinking like Christ or thinking LIKE THE WORLD.

What are the THOUGHTS & ATTITUDES of this world? - What are the thoughts & attitudes of heaven? - Which ones do I find my mind more consumed with? - Which ones dominate most of my thinking?

Let's begin first by seeing how Paul describes the THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES of this world - or as he phrases it, the thoughts & attitudes of those ON THE EARTH.

5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

Look at THE GARBAGE that consumes the thinking of the person whose mind is set on EARTHLY THINGS - “**Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire**” - these are all words that describe OUT OF CONTROL sexual behavior.

Fornication was the Greek word “**porneia**”. It was used to describe any form of sexual activity outside of marriage - sex before marriage, adultery, pornography, lust, homosexual behavior - it covered ALL FORMS of sex outside of the marriage of ONE MAN TO ONE WOMAN.

Uncleanness - spoke of being “sexually dirty”. It was used in contrast to MORAL PURITY.

Passion, in this context, describes LUSTING FOR ANOTHER - CRAVING PHYSICALLY someone to whom you are not married.

Evil desire is CRAVING OR DESIRING something that is MORALLY WRONG - again, in the context, something that is sexually wrong!

Remember, Paul is writing to a GREEK & ROMAN world that was dominated by SEXUAL IMMORALITY - The Roman world greatly resembled our world today - they just didn't have the INTERNET & CABLE TV to promote their SEXUAL PERVERSIONS!

What Paul describes as Earthly thinking is OVERWHELMINGLY SEXUAL - Could Anyone Seriously Argue with Paul on this point? - Our world has become so sexual that we don't even recognize how bad it has gotten!

The line of WHAT'S ACCEPTABLE has moved so far in our world today, that even we as Christians are LOSING SIGHT of what should be WRONG IN OUR EYES.

The other word Paul uses is COVETOUSNESS - **This is wanting things others possess that we don't have** - Paul equates it to IDOLATRY - we desire things to the point of WORSHIPING THEM!

Notice, all of these sins have to do WITH THE EYES - The eyes are a GREAT TOOL of satan to MOLD THE WAY we think - We ENTERTAIN OURSELVES with immoral pictures, TV shows & Youtube videos - then these become THE IMAGES that dominate our thinking!

This is why WE MUST GUARD OUR EYES - we must fight to AVOID THINGS that lead to worldly thinking - our eyes are the KEY!

But, now Paul is going to bring up FURTHER EVIDENCE that our minds are set on earthly things - More EVIDENCE THAT OUR MINDS are becoming corrupted - Look at verse 8.

8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

If our eyes are the GATEWAY TO CONSUME lust and ungodly desires into my heart, then MY MOUTH is the pipeline for THAT UGLINESS to spew out! - Look at what Paul describes as the NORM FOR THIS WORLD.

Anger and wrath - losing my temper and exploding at others!

Malice - saying things with the DESIRE TO HARM OTHERS - this is BEING INTENTIONAL with my malicious words in order to harm another!

Blasphemy is turning my UGLY WORDS towards God and His Son, Jesus!

Filthy language is simply PROFANITY - or COURSE WORDS that are lewd - or using words that have a DOUBLE MEANING - one the is clean on the surface, but it is meant to be TAKEN CRUELY!

LYING becomes the ultimate sign of a **WORLDLY MIND** - Our God is a God of **TRUTH** - Satan is the **GREAT DECEIVER** - Therefore, **WHOSE SIDE** are we on when we lie & deceive others?

So, when our focus is on the **THINGS OF THIS EARTH**, it is evidenced by our **EYES AND OUR MOUTH** - What my eyes **FOCUS ON** - and what my mouth **SPEWS OUT**!

What are your eyes and your mouth **REVEALING ABOUT** where your mind and its focus? - Unfortunately, the eyes and the mouth **DON'T LIE!** - Pun intended!

Paul's **SOLUTION** for us is to **"put off all these"** - the Greek words that Paul uses describe the act of **STRIPING OFF DIRTY, FILTHY** clothes and throwing them away - They are **SO FILTHY** that they can't even be **WASHED & SALVAGED**- they are **BEYOND HOPE OF CLEANING** - they must simply be **THROWN AWAY!**

When I was a child, we would go to Florida every year on vacation to visit my Grandparents - They lived in Jacksonville Beach - Each trip, my dad would take me and my brother **DEEP SEA FISHING** - It was so much fun!

But, we would come home from a day on the boat **COVERED IN SQUID JUICE & FISH GUTS** - our clothes would be **SO FILTHY**, my mom would make us **STRIP DOWN OUTSIDE** and we would have to wash under the outside shower.

The clothes went **STRAIGHT TO THE TRASH** - she would not even allow them **IN THE WASHING MACHINE** - In her mind, they were beyond **REDEMPTION!** - And this is exactly what **PAUL IS SAYING** about these **BEHAVIORS!**

This is what we have to do with **THESE WORLDLY WAYS OF THINKING & ACTING** - We have to **STRIP THEM OFF** and throw them away! - They can't just be **CLEANED UP OR MODIFIED** - they have to be **THROWN OUT!**

Some of you have been trying to **CLEAN THINGS UP** - But, it takes more than **CLEANING UP** - it takes **THROWING THINGS OUT** and starting over - We have to get our minds set on a **WHOLE NEW WAY** of thinking!

Look at verse 10, **and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.**

We have to **“put on the new man”** - Once we TEAR OFF those old, filthy clothes and threw them away - we have to PUT ON a new outfit - We have to PUT ON OUR NEW MAN.

The new person Christ has created in us must BEGIN TO SHINE THROUGH - We have to realize God HAS CHANGED US - We are not that person we USED TO BE - With God's Spirit now living inside us, WE HAVE CHANGED - We are someone new!

This NEW MAN inside us has been **“renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him” - whose image” - Jesus' image** - We have some NEW KNOWLEDGE in these once corrupted minds - it has been placed there by God's Spirit - it enables us to THINK LIKE JESUS THINKS!

Remember, we have a PART TO PLAY - We have to PUT THIS NEW WAY OF THINKING on - We can't be content to just THINK THE WAY we have always thought - We have to COOPERATE WITH God's Spirit - We must focus our thinking where HE DESIRES it to be!

The BEST NEWS is this - This NEW PERSON we have become is NOT DEPENDENT ON WHO we were before we MEET JESUS - it doesn't matter if we were a JEW OR A GREEK - it doesn't matter if we were a LAW KEEPER OR A LAW BREAKER - it doesn't matter if we were EDUCATED in the best universities, or were a HS DROPOUT! - It does matter if we were THE BOSS or the LOWEST EMPLOYEE on the social ladder!

We get a NEW START in Christ - and we are all STARTING WITH the same capability to change! - Nothing hinders you from being the NEW PERSON God has created within you! - PAUSE & THINK about that!

Now, starting in verse 12, we are going to see what it means to **“set our minds on things above”** - Paul is about to describe what are the PRIORITIES, the ATTITUDES, and the ACTIONS of Heaven.

Here in the next several verses, Paul is going to tell us 5 things about how the NEW MAN OR WOMAN IN CHRIST should think:

Verse 12 - The Attitudes of Heaven

Verse 13 - The Actions of Heaven

Verse 14 - The Achievement of Heaven

Verse 15 - The Arbiter of Heaven

Verse 16 - The Authority of Heaven

Then, in Verse 17, we are told how to become **The Ambassadors of Heaven!** - Let's spend the balance of our time this morning EXAMINING HOW we are to focus our thoughts - What are the ATTITUDES, ACTIONS & PRIORITIES of Heaven?

First, in verse 12, Paul list for us some of the ATTITUDES OF Heaven - **12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering;**

Instead of allowing MY EYES to be instruments of lustful pursuits, Paul encourages me to LOOK AROUND with the eyes of TENDER MERCIES - a good word for this would be COMPASSION - This is the ability to LOOK PAST the outward presentation of a person and to SEE THE NEEDS of their heart!

So often my eyes ONLY SEE THE OUTSIDE of a person - and I MISS THE HEART that is crying out for help - or FOR LOVE - or for a KIND WORD - OH, We see the SHAPE OF THEIR BODY, but we totally miss the CONDITION OF THEIR HEART!

But, I am not only to SEE THEIR NEED, but I am then to RESPOND WITH **KINDNESS** - Kindness is simply **compassion put into action!** - Kindness is compassion that has HANDS & FEET - We can have a heart to SEE A NEED, but then must also follow through by MEETING THAT NEED!

Oh how we saw this combination in the LIFE OF JESUS - Over and over he would HAVE COMPASSION on the multitudes . . . but then he would respond by HEALING THE SICK - or FEEDING the multitude - Jesus was able to SEE THE NEEDS . . . but he also had the heart to SUPPLY the need!

But, we do all of this with an **ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY** - So many times I see a need, and maybe I meet that need - but I do so with a HAUGHTY ATTITUDE - I am tempted to LOOK DOWN on the person in need - forgetting that BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD, that would be me!

This Christmas Season, what is motivating you TO HELP OTHERS? - Certainly, you see the needs - but are you RESPONDING WITH A HUMBLE heart? - Or are you helping others OUT OF PRIDE - OR A SENSE of superiority? - The attitude of our heart MATTERS AS MUCH as the giving of our time and money!

Jesus also HARNESSSED HIS POWER with **meekness** - When you think of the word meekness, think of the words, **"ME-LESS"** - it means USING MY POWER to bless others - rather than using it to BLESS ME! - Think of it as being the OPPOSITE OF A BULLY!

A bully uses his power to HUMILIATE OTHERS - the meek person uses his power to EMPOWER OTHERS - This is one of the MOST IMPORTANT attitudes of Heaven - Jesus said of the meek . . . these are the men & women who will **Inherit the Earth** - in the end, THE MEEK WIN - Not the bullies!

The last HEAVENLY ATTITUDE Paul mentions is **Long-suffering** - this attitude has at its heart **"the willingness to do things in God's timing, rather than when we want things to happen"**.

It is being WILLING TO ACCEPT that God knows best - It is TRUSTING that God has A PLAN & A PURPOSE for everything we face in this life - Long-suffering is putting FEET TO OUR FAITH!

We can say we are TRUSTING GOD - but if we complain every time things don't GO AS WE PLANNED THEM, then WE DON'T REALLY TRUST HIM - Long-suffering means a willingness to **SUFFER LONG** if that is what it takes for God to work His plan.

We must SET OUR MINDS on having these HEAVENLY ATTITUDES!

Now, in verse 13, we have the **Actions of Heaven - 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.**

To SET MY MIND of things above will mean I EXERCISE TWO ACTIONS on a daily basis - First, I will PUT FEET to my attitude of long-suffering, and **I will bear with the short-comings of others!** - Quite simply, I will PUT UP WITH the things that others do that frustrate me!

I will OVERLOOK their failures - I won't spend my energy JUDGING THEM - I won't TALK DOWN to them - I won't treat them as FAILURES - I will BEAR WITH THEM.

I will treat others like I do my grandsons when I am trying to teach them TO CATCH A BALL - I don't get ANGRY & FRUSTRATED at my 3-year-old because he can't catch a ball - No, I work with him - I UNDERSTAND his struggles - I PATIENTLY THROW BALL AFTER BALL to him knowing that one day he will catch it!

This is THE ACTION God wants us to take towards those who ARE STRUGGLING - We BEAR WITH THEM - We give them time to LEARN & GROW - We let God BE THEIR JUDGE - not us! - We understand our role is to KEEP TEACHING - Keep WORKING WITH THEM!

But, we also take ONE OTHER ACTION - **WE FORGIVE!** - I think many of us really don't understand what forgiveness involves - To forgive means, **I won't hold a grievance against another person, even though it hurt me!** - I will let go of THE GRUDGE - I will let go of the ANGER & BITTERNESS I may feel towards the person.

Forgiveness is not a ONE TIME EVENT - Forgiveness must be PRACTICED EVERY DAY - Forgiveness means I won't bring up the OFFENSE AGAIN - When I am tempted to GET ANGRY AGAIN and throw it BACK IN THEIR FACE, I stop myself and remember that I have CHOSEN TO FORGIVE!

Note that forgiveness is NOT OPTIONAL - Paul says, **"so you also MUST DO"** - Don't treat forgiveness like IT IS A CHOICE - According to Paul and Jesus, IT'S NOT - We can't expect God to SO GRACIOUSLY & WILLINGLY forgive us IF WE THEN turn around and REFUSE TO FORGIVE others!

Let's make PRACTICING PATIENCE & FORGIVENESS part of our everyday experience - Don't withhold from others what God has NOT WITHHELD from you! - We must SET OUR MINDS on practicing forgiveness!

In verse 14, we have **The Achievement of Heaven** - **But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.** - Maybe one of the GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS that was accomplished through our salvation was God giving to us the ABILITY TO LOVE OTHERS as He loves us!

Paul calls this **"the bond of perfection"** - the word perfection is used in the SENSE OF COMPLETION - When we love with GOD'S LOVE, there is a sense that HIS WORK IN US is being completed or perfected!

Notice, Paul says, **"But above all these things put on love"** - The emphasis he puts on love SHOWS JUST HOW IMPORTANT it is to the Christian's Walk - In **John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

IF LOVE is going to be our IDENTIFYING MARK as followers of Jesus, then it has to be OUR TOP PRIORITY - Don't take it lightly - Set your mind on LOVING OTHERS just as God has LOVED YOU! - Isn't love what allows us to BEAR WITH OTHERS - and to FORGIVE OTHERS?

Verse 15 says, **And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.** - Here Paul tells us about **The Arbiter of Heaven!**

Just as the PEACE OF GOD rules in Heaven, we need to let GOD'S PEACE guide our decisions & choices - It is VERY EASY to allow EARTHLY CIRCUMSTANCES to influence our decisions - **"Oh, this job will pay me more, so I will take it - This person is cuter, so I think I will go out with them - This decision makes me happier, so that is what I will do!"**

Money, Happiness, Outward appearance - This is how THE WORLD makes decisions - but this is not how the CHILD OF GOD is to make them - We are to SEEK THE PEACE of God - We are to LET GOD'S PEACE DICTATE our choices.

OFTEN GOD'S PLAN is not that one that makes the MOST EARTHLY SENSE - Just read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 - you quickly realize the VALUES OF HEAVEN are not what THIS WORLD VALUES - but God's PATH is the one that is accompanied by HIS PEACE.

When it comes to DECISIONS & CHOICES, I have to seek God's peace in those choices - The best job for me is the one that is ACCOMPANIED BY God's peace - The WISEST DATE FOR ME is the one that BRINGS GOD'S PEACE - Even in MOST PAINFUL choices, must be guided by GOD'S PEACE.

I have found God's peace has little to do WITH HAPPINESS - at least in the moment - Often God's peace REQUIRES ME to make tough choices that are SOCIALLY UNCOMFORTABLE & SOMETIMES FINANCIALLY painful - But, God's ways are NOT OUR WAYS - We must let His peace MAKE THE TOUGH CALLS in our lives.

To SET MY MIND on things above is to SEEK GOD'S PEACE in every decision of my life!

In verse 16, Paul confirms **The Authority of Heaven** - it is clearly the BIBLE - Here Paul calls it the WORD OF CHRIST - We read, **16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.**

To set your mind on things above is to HAVE YOUR LIFE RULED BY THE BIBLE - It is to let the WORD OF CHRIST DWELL in you - HIS WORD is to INFLUENCE YOU from the inside out - the Scripture gets inside of you and becomes the authority in EVERY AREA OF LIFE.

It adds WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE to your life - It gives you the ability to SEE LIFE the way GOD SEES IT - it gives you the ability to INTERPRET EXPERIENCES through the LENS OF HEAVEN.

It places you in the UNIQUE POSITION of being able to TEACH & ENCOURAGE OTHERS - Once the Word of God gets deep down in your heart, you are UNIQUELY PREPARED to help & teach others.

Jesus got really angry at the Pharisees for taking the AUTHORITY OF A TEACHER without really understanding the Scriptures - they claimed to be experts in it, but THEY WEREN'T - Jesus described the teaching of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:14 this way, **"They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."**

We don't want to be BLIND LEADERS - We need to SET OUR MINDS on learning the Word of God - One of my greatest fears in teaching the Word is that I MIGHT MISLEAD SOMEONE!

The way we guard against this is to work hard to LEARN HIS WORD - and to learn it in its PROPER CONTEXT - This is why we teach VERSE BY VERSE, chapter by chapter, book by book through the Bible - this method is a SAFEGUARD for both teacher and student!

Remember, they did not have the NT in Paul's day - it was being written - thus one of the TEACHING METHODS of that day was to teach Doctrinal truths through **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs** - These were SPIRITUAL TRUTHS put to music - and to SHORT, MEMORABLE PHRASES - it is still a great way to learn the Word of God!

Many of the SONGS WE TEACH THE CHILDREN in their worship time are Bible verses SET TO MUSIC! - IT WORKS! - To set your mind on things above is to SET YOUR MIND ON LEARNING God's Word!

Finally, we have been called to be **The Ambassadors of Heaven!** - In other words, we are called to REPRESENT JESUS here on Earth - In verse 17 we read, **And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**

There is ONE IMPORTANT THING we need to point out before we talk about becoming an EARTHLY REPRESENTATIVE of Jesus - We can only be His Representatives if OUR MINDS ARE CENTERED on the things above - the things that HIS MIND is focused on!

If my mind is FOCUSED & CONSUMED with sensual thoughts - If my heart REFUSES TO FORGIVE - if I have NO LOVE for those around me - If my decisions ARE NOT GUIDED by God's Peace - if I am not FILLING MY MIND with the Words of Christ - I can't very well REPRESENT THE HEART of Jesus here on earth.

God's hope is that EVERY WORD & ACTION I take would do just that - be a word or deed that would REFLECT THOSE of our Lord Jesus - that when people WATCH my actions & reactions, they would BE REMINDED of the ACTIONS & WORDS of Jesus!

To do something in SOMEONE'S NAME is to perform a deed just as THEY WOULD DO IT - It is to SPEAK WORDS that they might speak if they were involved in the conversation.

Many years ago I realized that this was MY ROLE AS ASSISTANT PASTOR when I filled in on a Sunday for Pastor Sandy - That Sunday did not become MY DAY TO CHANGE the services to fit MY WHIMS & DESIRES - It was not my job to come in and CHANGE THE WORSHIP STYLE - or change the ORDER OF THE SERVICE - or to teach in a way that did not REFLECT CCSM.

No, when Pastor Sandy is away, HE HOPES & EXPECTS that I will provide a service for our congregation that reflects what he would do IF HE WERE HERE!

Certainly Pastor Sandy wants ME TO BE ME - He wants me to use the GIFTS AND ABILITIES that God has given me - The last thing he wants is for me to TRY TO BE HIM!

I'm pretty sure Jesus is THAT SAME WAY - Our goal is not to JUST MIMICK JESUS - no, our callings is to REPRESENT HIM, not try to BE HIM - We take our GIFTS, our ABILITIES, our PERSONALITY - but then we do things with the HEART & STYLE & SPIRIT of Jesus!

We are to be ourselves - but we are ourselves TOUCHED & FILLED with the love & compassion & forgiveness & wisdom of Jesus - and that can ONLY HAPPEN when our minds are set on THINGS ABOVE!

Are you ready to be His AMBASSADOR on the crazy place we call earth? -

Then, have

The Attitudes of Heaven

And perform

The Actions of Heaven

Let your love be

The Achievement of Heaven

Let God's peace in your life be

The Arbiter of Heaven

And study the Word so that you can have

The Authority of Heaven

Let me close with this short poem by Lois Cheney:

Today,

For what I am that I ought not to be, Forgive Me.

For what I am not that I ought to be, Forgive Me.

Be with my mouth in what it speaks.

Be with my hands in what they do.

Be with my mind in what it thinks.

Be with my heart in what it feels.

Work in me, through me, for me, in spite of me.

Let's Pray.