

Colossians 3:1-14

Week 7 - Set Your Mind On Things Above

Learning Objectives

- Understand the difference between the old and new natures, and that it's an active, constant choice of which nature we're going to live from.
- Discuss how to shift our attitudes and behavior from being self-oriented to being others-oriented.

? Tell about a time you tried something new, completely out of your comfort zone, when you didn't know what to expect. What did you try, and how did that experience feel?

Colossians 3:1-14 (NIV)

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.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: 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 also 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 ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile 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 one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

? What are the Colossians specifically commanded to do in this passage?

Possible Answers: 1) Set your mind on things above, not earthly things—this is a repeated theme! 2) Put to death your earthly, sinful nature. 3) Love! This binds together all of the virtues listed in vs. 12-13.

? Underline all the verbs in this passage. What can we learn about our old and new natures from Paul's language choices in verses 2, 5, 12, and 14?

Possible Answers: Paul writes these verbs as commands that we must choose to follow. How we live is an active choice and ongoing behavior. It's not passive! It's a daily (or sometimes even minute-to-minute) decision: Will you put on your new nature and be renewed, or will you leave the old nature "lurking within you" (NLT translation, vs. 5)?

? How do these choices play out in a practical way?

Possible Answers: "Set your mind on things above" could mean regularly meditating on scripture or having a longer view of things—not just looking for how your actions or choices will have immediate effect, but how they can affect eternity. "Put to death" could mean getting an accountability partner or mentor who helps call you out on sins and flee from them. "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" and "put on love" could mean finding one intentional act of kindness or compassion to do each day, it could mean putting others before yourself, it could be pausing during a disagreement to think before you speak—but whatever it is, it requires intentionality and practice.

? Why do you think we are called to set our minds on "things above" and what is the significance of this? Why is this comforting?

Possible Answers: Our "real" identity is with God—eternal, above the storms of life, out of reach of the devil's schemes. It gives our thoughts, actions, and decisions an eternal perspective. This is significant because we don't have to wait until eternity to experience the peace, hope, and joy of the Lord. Our lives are already hidden with Christ in God!

? "Put to death" is a very strong phrase. Why did Paul call for such extreme measures?

Possible Answers: Because you aren't supposed to live out these things—you're supposed to completely and permanently get rid of them! There's no life to be found in sexual immorality, impurity, lust, etc., and Paul is trying to warn them away from the dark paths these things lead down.

? Paul adds some additional "do not's" in verse 8. Why do you think you are supposed to go that extra distance with these things in particular?

Possible Answers: These are outward actions, representations of ourselves (while the list in vs. 5 are more internal/hidden struggles). While some of these "do not's" aren't explicitly sinful—after all, God himself is sometimes angry—it speaks volumes when we don't allow these actions to overtake us. To a watching world, this list could be the difference between someone who has experienced the peace of Christ and someone who has not. Choosing to not live out those actions could be a significant example to our friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

? What sin does Paul address with its own command? Why do you think that is?

Possible Answers: Lying. It's so easy to lie, and somewhat socially acceptable—to the point that we've coined the term "white lie" for lies we deem more acceptable. But a lie always needs more lies to cover up the original, and it's a deep, dark pit we find ourselves in if we allow lying to become a pattern in our lives.

? Contrast verses 12-14 with verses 5-7. Imagine a person living the first life versus a person living the second. What outward differences would you see in their life? When faced with conflict or criticism, how might they respond differently?

Possible Answers: The person living the first life lives to please and satisfy themselves; they take action that furthers what they want, and is very selfish in their overall behavior and attitude. The person living the second life lives to please God and to bless others; they take action that is obedient to God's commands and puts others first, living humbly and joyfully despite circumstances and personality. The first person may respond more harshly and defensively in conflict or criticism, since their motivation is internal and has no greater meaning or justification. On the other side, the second person will be steadier and centered in Christ, not feeling defensive of themselves but confident in their obedience to God.

Christ is all, and is in all.

Re-read verse 11. In Christ, we are not separated by race, heritage, religion, status, or anything else! Christ binds us all together. What does this mean? You're not better than anyone else, but you're not worse than anyone else either. You all have the same commands, and no one has exemptions or extra work when it comes to salvation. Christ is ALL, and is IN all!

? Optional question: Which of the positive qualities outlined in verses 12-14 do you see in specific people in our small group? Which trait do you admire most?

Possible Answers: Personal; will vary.

Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)

¹ "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

? It's easy to assign flaws, failures, and sins to others in our life—and then totally overlook our own. How can we begin to see our own sins and flaws clearly?

Possible Answers: We can find an accountability partner or mentor who will call us out and help us keep ourselves in check. As a small group, during prayer time, we can share our struggles and create a safe space to admit our own shortcomings and sins. We can ask God to give us the humility to see our own flaws, then put in the hard work to improve.

Boundaries

Though Jesus calls us to forgive others innumerable, we are allowed to set boundaries—we don't just have to continue accepting everything everyone says or does to us. We can forgive, but also choose to walk away or distance ourselves from an unhealthy relationship, a dramatic work environment, an explosive family dynamic, etc.

? Forgiveness is not easy. When someone has hurt or wronged us, it can feel impossible to offer them forgiveness. Why does Paul call us to forgive others anyway? How does it benefit you and the person you're forgiving?

Possible Answers: When it comes down to it, we forgive because God already forgave us. But, within the church, forgiveness also builds unity and health among believers. Forgiveness helps us realize the gravity of what Jesus did for us, and it frees us from bitterness and anger over a situation that has hurt us. There is sometimes a palpable

weight that lifts when we extend forgiveness. Forgiving someone may also offer a person their first encounter with grace—in that way, you're being Christ to them.

Optional: Cross-reference Matthew 18:21-22: "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"

? Share a story of a time you forgave someone. How did you feel, before and after? Alternatively, tell a story of when someone you hurt forgave you. How did you feel?

Possible Answers: Personal; will vary.

? Why is love the final and greatest thing to do? What does it look like for this group to love in a way that binds together?

Possible Answers: God is love, and He calls us to love. Love is the ultimate unselfishness, focusing on others and behaving as Christ did. Even if we fall or fail in the other things, love can cover over our failures and assure people of our sincerity and desire for their benefit. Love is something we are continually called to as believers, and the ultimate expression of Christ.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Is there anyone in your life you need to forgive? Is there anyone in your life you need to ask forgiveness from?

? Which of Paul's commands would you like to work on most, in your own life? What specific things can you do this week to improve in one or two of these areas?