

The Book of Colossians

Lesson 9: Seek the Things Above -- Colossians 3:1-11

Watch where a person's eyes go when they think no one is looking, and you will learn what they love. We become what we behold. The student who dreams all day about the game becomes a player; the heart fixed on money slowly takes the shape of its treasure. Paul knows this, and so, having spent two chapters lifting our eyes to Christ, he now turns and says: keep them there. If you have been raised with Christ, he writes, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things on earth. The Christian life, it turns out, has a direction. It looks up.

And notice the order. Paul does not say, climb your way up to Christ. He says you have already been raised with Christ, so now live like it. This is the great pattern of the gospel: God acts first, and our obedience flows out of what He has already done. You died, Paul says. Your old life is over. And your real life now, your truest self, is hidden with Christ in God, safe and out of sight, waiting for the day when Christ who is your life appears, and you appear with Him in glory. Your best moment is not behind you in some lost golden memory. It is ahead of you, and it is wrapped up in Him.

But a heart set on things above cannot keep dragging the old life along, so Paul gets specific and surprisingly blunt. Put to death, he says, the things that belong to the old self: sexual immorality, greed (which he calls idolatry to its face), anger, slander, filthy talk, lying. He uses the language of the wardrobe. Take off the old self like a filthy garment you have outgrown, and put on the new self, which is being renewed, day by day, into the very image of the God who made you. The old clothes do not fit a risen person anymore.

And here is the wonder of this new humanity Christ is creating. In it, Paul says, there is no Greek or Jew, no insider or outsider, no slave or free. The old dividing lines that the world fights and bleeds over simply lose their power, because Christ is all, and in all. Read this passage and feel the pull of it, upward toward Christ and outward toward one another. You have been raised. Now lift your eyes, change your clothes, and become who you already are.

Group Discussion: Paul says, set your minds on things above, not on things on earth (v. 2). In a world designed to capture our attention with a thousand earthly things, why is the direction of our thoughts so important, and what does it actually look like, day to day, to set the mind on things above?

Personal Reflection: Paul says your real life is now hidden with Christ in God, and that Christ Himself is your life. When you are honest, what do you tend to treat as your life, the thing you cannot imagine living without? How would it change you to find your truest identity hidden in Christ instead?

Study Questions

1. Paul 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 (v. 1). What does it tell us that Paul roots our pursuit of heavenly things in something already accomplished (we have been raised), and what does it mean that Christ is right now seated and reigning at the right hand of God?
2. Paul commands us to set our minds on things above. Be honest about where your mind naturally drifts in idle moments. What earthly thing most often captures your thoughts, and what is one concrete way you could begin redirecting your attention upward this week?
3. Paul says you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God, and that when Christ who is your life appears, you also will appear with Him in glory (vv. 3–4). What does it mean that our true life is now hidden with Christ, and how does the promise of appearing with Him in glory reshape the way we view our present life?
4. Paul says Christ is your life. Where have you been looking for your sense of life and identity, in your work, your family, your reputation, your accomplishments? What would it mean to let those good things be gifts rather than your life, and to find your life in Christ alone?
5. Paul commands, put to death therefore what is earthly in you, and lists sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which he calls idolatry (v. 5). Why does Paul use the violent language of putting to death rather than merely managing these sins, and why does he identify covetousness, the craving for more, as a form of idolatry?
6. Paul calls us to put to death specific sins, not just sin in general. Which one earthly thing on Paul's list (or beneath it) is God pressing you to put to death right now? What does putting it to death, rather than negotiating with it, actually require of you?
7. Paul moves to a second list, sins of disposition and speech: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying to one another (vv. 8–9). Why does Paul give such weight to sins of temper and tongue, which we often excuse as minor, and what do these sins do to the body of Christ?
8. Our words and our temper reveal what is really in our hearts. Think about your speech and your anger over the past week, especially toward those closest to you. Where do your words and reactions not yet match the new self, and what would it look like to put those sins away?
9. Paul says 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, and then declares that here there is not Greek and Jew, slave and free, but Christ is all, and in all (vv. 9–11). What does it mean that the new self is being renewed into the image of God, and how does being in Christ break down the divisions that the world treats as ultimate?
10. Look back across this passage. Paul lifts your eyes to the reigning Christ, secures your life in Him, calls you to strip off the old and put on the new, and folds you into a new humanity where Christ is all. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these

verses. What is the single truth from Colossians 3:1-11 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 6:11-14, counting yourselves dead to sin and alive to God; Romans 8:5-8, the mind set on the flesh versus the mind set on the Spirit; Galatians 3:27-28, all one in Christ, no Jew or Greek, slave or free; Ephesians 4:22-24, putting off the old self and putting on the new; Matthew 6:19-21, laying up treasure in heaven, where your heart will be.