

Title: Lift Up Your Eyes

Text: Colossians 3:1-11

I trust that you are excited to hear from The Lord today.

If you are a guest with us today, we are moving methodically through Paul's letter to the Colossians, and today we break into chapter 3. If you were here last week, you'll remember that Paul challenged the Colossians not to abandon the gospel of grace through faith in Christ - calling on the church to be careful not to follow man-made traditions in the place of following Christ.

Now, you may have felt a tension in the text last week that was unresolved, namely that we weren't really told what our lives should look like. We were told NOT to follow tradition and law, NOT to go backward, and NOT to pursue man-made principles. This week we will hear what the new life in Christ is supposed to look like.

Paul is going to call the church to lift up your eyes from the mud and walk as the new creation that you truly are in Christ, putting off the old self.

As I was preparing this message, an old song bolted through my mind....

"I keep a close watch on this heart of mine. I keep my eyes wide open all the time. I keep the ends out for the tie that binds. Because you're mine, I walk the line."

"I find it very very easy to be true. I find myself alone when each day is through. Yes I'll admit that I'm a fool for you. Because you're mine, I walk the line." - Johnny Cash

What is that song about? It's about a relationship that motivates you to live differently. It's written from the perspective of a man that knows he's got a woman that he doesn't want to lose with his wild lifestyle (this was Johnny Cash after all), so he straightens up and aspires to "walks the line" to honor this relationship. He wants to watch the way he acts around other women. He keeps a close watch on his heart. He doesn't go out ramblin' like he used to. Why? "Because you're mine, I walk the line."

Now obviously it's not a perfect analogy between Johnny Cash, us, and Christ. But the general theme remains.... You can't enter into a relationship with one that you love, and then proceed to live however you want. That's not what being faithful and respectful is.

And so Paul today is talking to those that have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, and have committed to follow Him. His point is that when you become a Christian, there is a birth of a new relationship. There is a new covenant made. There is a new responsibility and expectation of lifestyle.

Though we, as Christians, enjoy the only faith that employs grace and mercy and forgiveness from God - it's equally tempting to take *advantage* of that grace. How many times have you heard someone say or imply, "I'll just sin now and ask for forgiveness later, after all, Jesus loves me and died for me." Our human hearts look for loopholes and ways to sin. And one of those ways is to use grace as a cover for knowingly sinning.

But what Paul wants to make absolutely clear today, is that there should be a new life in Christ that is different from the life you left behind. Christ is not just an addition to soothe our guilty conscience so that we can sin more. No, rather we are made into new creations that should have more in common with heavenly things than with earthly things. We are called to be different from the world in the way that we live, empowered by the Spirit to walk worthy of The Lord.

Salt that is not salty is useless and of no value. Likewise, Christians ought to look more like Jesus than the world. And everything in the world is pulling on you to focus on earthly matters, engage in the celebration and acceptance of sin, and to divide you into warring ideologies against one another. But there is new life in Christ. And I want to show you three new gifts that come with the new life in Christ.

Examine your thoughts today. Examine your lifestyle today. Examine your relationship with others today. And at the end of the message, I will ask you - are you living a new life, or the old life? Is your life closer to Christ, or to the world.

(Pray)

Let's look at our text today in Colossians 3:1, and we will first read through verse 4.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory

When you get Christ, you get a new life. And that new life affords us three things...
First...A New life in Christ yields...

1. A NEW MIND.

If you'll remember, last week Paul presented man-made religion and tradition as lowly "elementary" or "basic principles." It was a focus on earthly things to a fault. But now he is saying, lift up your eyes and seek the things that are above, where Christ is. In other words... Christ ascended up into the sky after His resurrection to the right hand of God... so keep your focus on heavenly things where Christ is.

In v2, Paul uses the Greek "*phroneo*," which is one word behind the phrase "set your minds on." It means, to think on, to dwell on, to ponder, or to fix your attention to something. So we are to think on things that are heavenly, where Christ is - NOT to think on earthly things.

Now obviously there is nuance to this - you need to think about how to find food and earn a living and how to fix the sink and clean the bathroom - all earthly things. Paul is not advocating for the old phrase "To be so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good." This is not that. He is saying that, in your life, do not let earthly matters consume your thoughts and certainly do not neglect spiritual matters. Don't give spiritual thoughts once or two hours a week at church - and then put it on the shelf until Sunday. And certainly, don't let sinful thoughts run rampant and unchecked through the halls of your mind. Set your mind on things above.

If you could print out an activity log for your mind and your thoughts from the past 7 days and see every thought put to words, categorized.... what would be the primary content of your mind? If it were categorized by a bar-graph, what would be the largest few categories? What about those sinful categories - gossip thoughts - lustful thoughts - anger thoughts - coveting thoughts? What about idle wasted time staring at a phone or a TV or a video game or a device?

Are we setting our minds on things that are above, not on earth?

One of the great hallmarks of a Christian is that they have a renewed mind. And a renewed mind is consistently juxtaposed against a fallen mind focused on the world.

Romans 12:2 says *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”*

In this we know that sin has affected, not just our bodies, but our actions. Very few (if any) sins of the body do not first originate in the mind. The mind is the battlefield for the soul. Where the mind goes, the body goes.

This is why our world seeks to get to our children’s minds early and often and tell them lies about God and His Word, and it seems like every year the battle goes to younger and younger children. This is why the world seeks to target college students that have left their parents for the first time and introduce ideologies that often transgress the Word of God and seek to undermine it. This is why the media, and Hollywood, and academia, and social media tech companies run round-the-clock interference to block the spread of Christian principles and truth. This is why every cultural battle begins with the changing of language and the shifting of vocabulary to mean something different than it used to mean. And it’s why other countries have banned the gospel and the Scriptures altogether - because even the world knows that when you reach the mind, you’ve got the whole person.

Where you focus your mind will deeply impact your life, your emotions, your health, and your soul. A Christian that routinely focuses their mind on sin will look like the world. You can’t escape your own mind.

This is why Paul also wrote in Philippians 4:8

“whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” So don’t let your mind scrape the gutter.

Christ came not only to change our behaviors, but also to renew our minds. To change the way that we think. Sin affects not only the body, but also the mind, and our mind needs redemption just as our body and spirit do.

Colossians 3:3 tells us why we should focus our minds above...

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”

When you trusted in Christ to save you, and committed to follow Him, you made a break with your old self. You cut loose from the dock. You pulled the chain on the hot air balloon and lifted off from the ground below.

And as you grow in Christ, you should see your old self on the ground getting farther and farther away and you should also see Christ getting closer and closer in the heavens. He is where your new life is. Your life is hidden with Christ. And even in your mind, you are to leave the old way that you used to think - behind.

Don't think the way you used to. Christ has given you a new mind to focus on Him and to think the way that He would think.

But also in our new life with Christ - we receive...

2. A NEW MORALITY.

Remember, what begins in the mind always works itself out into real life. And that's what we are going to see in Colossians 3:5-10. Let's read that together as Paul speaks very practically about what our life should look like.

"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator"

I'm going to do my best to help categorize and make sense of these lists of sins that Paul gives us. It's also a good time to remind us again that Paul writes from a Jewish context to a Gentile audience. Most of his letters go out to churches wherein people learned about Jesus *before* they heard of the Old Testament.

America and other areas with Christian influence may take for granted that people know what sin is and isn't. But Paul wrote to areas where pagan religions had dominated for centuries without any biblical revelation of truth.

But what is interesting is that today in our modern culture, we see that Paul's arguments have actually become more relevant to us than perhaps 50 years ago.

First Paul says in v5 to put to death - sexual immorality (Greek *porneia*) which is used 24 times in the New Testament. This word that used to be translated to the english word "fornication." This is any sexual encounter outside of God's chosen avenue for human sexuality, which is covenant marriage. Using this first really sets up this list.

The next three really belong together - impurity, passion and evil desires - all picture a craving for lust within the sexual arena. Paul is describing a consuming, wrongful desire that captivate a person and enslaves them to their most base desires.

And to top it off, he lists covetousness. On its own, we may think that this sin is out of place in the list of sexual sins. But even in the 10 commandments itself, God says that a man shall not covet his neighbor's wife.

So in our context, it is clear that Paul is getting at a pattern of self-control. This first list is about self-control with a nod to human sexuality. This seemed to be a consistent problem in Pagan Gentile areas.

The new life in Christ commands that we not give in to every desire that crosses our mind, and does not entertain it (as Paul said "put it to death.") We are not to train it or play with it or watch it grow as our pet. We are to put those desires to death.

Allow me to speak to you bluntly about sexual sin, church. We live in a day that needs boldness and clarity on these things. In the interest of time, I'm just going to give you two major clarifications today - but they are the two that are needed most right now.

First - As a culture, pornography is killing us slowly. We have all but given in to it and accepted it as a normal part of life. I believe this is one of the reasons that young men are delaying marriage - they are substituting a real woman for screens. If you are a young man or woman here struggling with pornography - you need to come to the realization that this is a sin, and it is not harmless. Your mind will be affected, and your relationships will be affected. You can not accept that this is your life.

Also - if you are struggling - (I am completely serious) - I want you to know that you can come to me and tell me and I will be an accountability for you. If you need to set up a internet accountability software, I can recommend one or two, and if you can't pay for it - I will do my best to find you a sponsor. If you need to get rid of your smartphone and purchase a dumphone that has no internet access, I will help you pick out the best Nokia black/yellow phone or the best Jitterbug that money can buy.

And you're probably thinking "everyone would notice I don't have an iPhone." No they wouldn't - a lot of people are voluntarily doing this to get away from distractions and smartphone addiction. There are people without pornography addictions that are concerned about their smartphone and social media addiction.

This is what Jesus meant by “if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.” I might even do the smartphone challenge with you if you ask me real nice.

Secondly - it has become clear that the dividing line of our day in our culture has become the acceptance of homosexuality. The church always has been faced with decision moments; times to choose a side. We used to think that the teaching of evolution from the pulpit might be the big one - but this has actually calmed down.

Make no mistake - the issue that is on our front doorstep and is soon coming inside the house is whether or not you will accept homosexuality as good, and then champion it as an ally.

The only reason that I don't mention abortion here is that though they are equally as sinful in their pursuits, they are nowhere near as aggressive as the modern LGBT movement. It has progressed from “don't ask don't tell,” to “why do you care what happens in the privacy of my bedroom,” to “let us have marriage so that we can have the same tax and social privileges,” to “If you don't affirm us, we are going to sue you,” to “we are going to teach your children that this is good” to “children have the right to make decisions about their gender and parents have no rights in the matter.”

We are taught that sexual sin is our identity. It's who we are. We are born that way. And it defines us as people. To deny someone's sexuality is to deny their personhood. But that's just not true. You are more than your sexuality. Your identity is not found in your sexual choices, or non-choices. The Lord Jesus never engaged in a sexual relationship and He was certainly a person.

What's at the heart of the matter is coming *under authority*. If I tell an unmarried man to stop having sex until he is married, I am not stripping him of his identity or personhood. If I tell a married man not to have an affair, I'm not harming him. If I tell a man to stop looking at pornography, I'm not denying him of his most basic rights to happiness.

At the core of the issue is the denial of God's authority to call the shots in our lives and define our actions. There is a God who hates sin and v6 says that the wrath of God is coming. Our culture has lied to us and told us that every sexual impulse must be acted upon, and to limit our freedom to act is a denial of personhood. But it's simply not true. We are not the sum of our sexual choices.

And to both of those concerns that I raised, pornography and homosexuality... Paul says “put it to death,” and “in these you too *once walked*.” That means that any sin can be put to death, even sexual sins that we claim are our orientation. Paul would not command to put it to death if it was not possible.

Also he says that there are those that “once walked” in these sins before they knew Christ... but don’t anymore. Boy does that fly in the face of what we are told? No sin is too grave for Christ. These are sins of self-control. The new person in Christ is granted the ability to have self control over their passions and doesn’t have to act on every rogue impulse.

Next we see more in v8 - these are sins of outburst - anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying to one another. This list of sins differs from the first in that it is more *social* in nature. Whereas lust and covetousness happen in the heart toward someone else - anger, slander, obscene talk, and lying typically require an audible audience.

These sins can destroy relationships, and Paul knew that this is a serious concern. Christianity is a social religion. It’s not mountaintop chanting with the monk. We gather in close quarters all the time, and our great commission is to go “into all the world” preaching teaching and baptizing. You have to be able not to offend or hurt every person that comes into contact with you.

You know it’s true. Anger, wrath, and malice... do you like to be around angry people that are like a ticking time bomb, ready to go off on you? Do you love walking on egg shells around someone that gets set off by everything? Do you enjoy the company of people that say hurtful, malicious things to you, call you names? Do you like that? Of course not. It destroys relationships.

What about people that are always gossiping or talking about others behind their back, slandering them? Do you like that person that always just seems to be a magnet for drama and is always somehow in the middle of everything? What about that person that constantly talks dirty or has no filter on their tongue to say crude things no matter the company?

What about someone that lies, someone that you just can’t trust to keep anything confidential. We all know that one person that always seems to be working behind the scenes to manipulate through lies and make themselves look good.

The point is that, eventually, if you are one of these types of people - not only are you sinning and not walking in Christ - but you will look up one day and be very lonely. The only type of person that wants to surround themselves with toxic and unhealthy people that love drama are other toxic and unhealthy people that love drama. And boy let me tell you there's not much worse than a church full of toxic and unhealthy people that love drama and think that they are on mission for Christ. That is an odor and a stench to God.

Coming to Christ gives us a new morality. We are no longer lifting our finger to the wind to discover what our morals are. We do not listen to our sinful urges and call them good. We do not say harmful things to each other. The new life in Christ is marked by self-control, and peace, and honesty.

In Christ we have a new mind, a new morality, and lastly....

3. A NEW MODEL

Everything we have seen is countercultural today. It all flies in the face of what the world does. This last verse continues the trend and pushes back on something we see thriving today. Let's look at v11 to conclude our text for today. Paul is going to tell us what it looks like as we live together operating on these principles...

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all

Wherein the sinful mind wants to place people into ranks and categorize our worth - the new life in Christ sees that we are all sinners saved by grace.

This actually comes at a very important time in our culture. One of the secular culture's biggest tactics right now is to place people into groups. Sometimes it is called "identity politics" and other times it is called "intersectionality." But the basic premise is that people are to be placed into broad categories and pitted against each other as oppressed and oppressor.

Division may be all the rage right now, but Paul is very clear. Allegiance to Christ supersedes and trumps any possible difference that we could have with one another.

First he says, there is not Greek and Jew. This would refer to one's national or ethnic affiliation.

Next he mentions circumcised and uncircumcised. This would refer to those that were born into a religious background or those that came to Christ later in life as an adult.

Next he mentions barbarians and Scythian. These were areas thought of as the most uncivilized areas in the world. Paul was making an argument that to be from a higher class culture did not make you a more valuable Christian.

And lastly he mentions slave and free. This would refer to the economic differences between people that came to Christ - those that were wealthy and those that had to go into indentured work.

This is a beautiful picture of the church. Our connection as believers in Christ with the same mind and morality should connect us beyond any worldly connection. The world constantly wants to divide and rank us, but that is not how Christ sees people.

Another reason that I want to see this church go on an overseas mission trip is that you get to experience Christian fellowship with someone that has no cultural or political connection to you. In fact, you will find that you actually have more in common with a Christian in Africa than with an unbelieving neighbor on your street.

And this is true even in the church. This is what Calvary Hills should aspire toward. Paul used words that fit his context, but here I'm going to switch out to make them fit us.

Here there is not Hispanic, White, or Black. It doesn't matter whether you grew up in church or joined us last week. It doesn't matter if you can afford a house on the North Side or South Side, inside the loop or outside the loop. It doesn't matter if you wear a white collar or a blue collar to work. There are no distinctions to those in Christ Jesus.

And I pray that this church becomes more diverse for that very reason. Not for some affirmative action, quota filling, optics test. But that we are just people seeking Jesus together, and if you live within driving distance of Calvary Hills - you are our target demographic and you can play a part in the kingdom here.

This is what heaven will be like.... our eyes will be lifted up and focused on the throne where Christ sits. We won't have our nose in the mud fighting about who gets to sit where and of what group we are in. There is just a beloved child of God in His presence.

Church, there is a new life for those that are in Christ. We are new creations at the moment we follow Jesus and pursue after Him. And yes, it takes time to grow into the man or woman that God wants you to be. And yes it takes discipline. But with the Spirit's help, you will be more and more conformed into the image of Jesus.

And He gives us a new mind. A New morality. And a new model for our relationships.

I invite you today - examine your thoughts. Examine your lifestyle. Examine your relationships. Are you living closer to Christ or to the world? Lift up your eyes and fix your gaze upon Christ, and leave the world behind.