

June 21, 2020

# The Core of Christianity

## Part 2

Colossians 2:16-3:1-4

The keys to Christian flourishing are but two: Fellowship with Christ and Living by Christ.

LTS: Eph. 4:17-24

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”

Last time we met, we were reminded of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century astronomer, Nicholas Copernicus who discovered that all the mathematicians and astronomers of all previous ages had been wrong about the order of our solar system. And the reason they had all been wrong for such a long time was because they had all mistakenly oriented their foundational calculations upon the earth rather than the sun. In my mind, this became kind of a parable for what the apostle Paul was teaching the believers both in ancient Colossae and modern Fort Worth, when he wrote Col. 3:1-4.

So, let's begin this morning by reading that passage together.

Read Col. 3:1-5

This is the third time we have considered these verses so you already know that Paul, here, is helping us see that the Core of the Christian life can be stated in two commands:

- A. Keep seeking the Person of Christ
- B. Keep Setting your mind on Christ.

Last week the whole message focused on Point 1

### I. Keep Seeking the Person of Christ.

1. In other words, the first thing we find at the core of the Christian life is a conscious dependence on Christ that leads us to fly to him for everything we need and every impulse to worship.

## 2. The second command, however is To Keep Setting our Minds on Christ:

But before we refresh our souls on this text, let's stand together and read it.

Read Col. 3:1-4

Now, let's talk about what Paul means when he says..

## II. Keep Setting your Minds on Christ:

Read v. 2, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on the things that are on earth."

1. Once again "set your minds" is an Act. Imp. verb. In other words, Paul is giving us a command that we should do and never stop doing. From the beginning, then, we begin to realize that "Keep setting your minds" must be a major part of Christian flourishing that involves what you permit yourself to think about.

2. A few weeks ago we learned that the most important part of battling temptation is what you do when you when you're NOT being tempted. More specifically, what do you think about when you're not being tempted? Paul wants us to be strategic and intentional with those thoughts.

3. When we talk about Christian flourishing, we understand intuitively that what church you belong to matters; Your choice of friends matters; Cultivating spiritual discernment matters. other things matter. But do we understand that what we allow our minds to dwell upon matters even more? The preoccupation of your mind matters more than anything because ...what you do is always preceded by what you think. What you set your mind upon is big in the Christian life because Whatever controls the mind controls the person. Paul implies this truth in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans where he writes (5-6) that...

those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on

the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

6. What Paul is saying here is that the reason a person lives according to the flesh is because he has set his mind on the things of the flesh. And the reason a person lives according to the Spirit of God is because he has set his mind on the things of the Spirit.

7. So perhaps it is evident now why I call this short series *The Core of Christianity*. The Christian life - at its core - is NOT merely about going to a certain place on Sunday and doing religious things - even if those things are biblical, right and good. Rather, the Core of Christianity is how you relate to Jesus Christ from the depths of your inner person; how you relate to him from the heart, even down to the secret thoughts of your mind.

8. To set one's mind on things above, then, is synonymous with setting his mind on the things of the Spirit. It means that we are intentional about orienting our thoughts toward Christ and the things in which His Spirit delights whenever possible. Thoughts about Christ, his promises, his saving atonement, his grace, his kindness, etc. should be common throughout any given day.

9. John Owen, in his little book called *Thinking Spiritually*, suggests:

We can test ourselves by asking whether our spiritual thoughts are like guests visiting a hotel, or like children living in a home. There is a temporary stir and bustle when guests arrive, yet within a little while they leave and are forgotten. The hotel is then prepared for other guests. So it is with spiritual thoughts that are only occasional. But children belong to their house. They are missed if they don't come home. Preparation is continually being made for their food and comfort. Spiritual thoughts that arise from true spiritual mindedness are like the children of the house. Always expected, and certainly inquired about if missing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *Thinking Spiritually*, (London, England Grace Publications Trust, 1995), 21

10. The kind of spiritual mindedness Paul is calling for is not something that happens automatically. Like most areas of sanctification, it must be intentionally cultivated.

11. In verse 2, then, Paul says, “Set your minds on things above and NOT on things that are on earth. Notice the contrast here. On the positive side we are to set our minds on things above. Negatively, we are Not to set our minds on the things of earth.

12. Now clearly, Paul is not suggesting that we all quit our jobs, form a commune and spend all our time meditating on the eternal. To the contrary, having a strong work ethic is demonstrably biblical. Max Anders nudges us in the right direction on Paul’s meaning here when he writes that

What Paul is saying... is that believers are NOT to be concerned only with the trivialities of the temporal. We are to be preoccupied with the things that get top billing in heaven. Heavenly values are to capture our imaginations, emotions, thoughts, feelings, ideas, and actions. The believer is to see everything, including earthly things, against the backdrop of eternity.<sup>2</sup>

13. Paul is not talking about being so heavenly minded that you’re no earthly good. Rather, he’s talking about having a Christ-besotted mindset that considers the place of Christ and the mind of Christ in every situation.

Consider a few practical questions to stir us toward spiritual mindedness:

- How can I please Christ when my boss is having a bad day?
- How does Christ want me to respond to my parents when their careless words hurt?
- What has Jesus told me to do when I’m tempted by the lusts of this world?
- How does Christ want me to think about the stimulus check I just received?
- How does he want me to respond to the noisy neighbor or his dog’s intolerable barking!

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<sup>2</sup> Max Anders, [\*Galatians-Colossians\*](#), vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 327.

- How should I respond to the beauty of a sunset or some other magnificent display of Christ's creative artistry?

14. I think it's safe to say that Paul assumes we are not in a habit of cultivating this kind of mindset. We tend simply to let our minds take us wherever our impulses may lead. And yet, though Paul himself was in Jail and no doubt had 10,000 to think about, he clearly had his mind fixed on Christ. Moreover, knowing our propensity to be lazy in our thinking, Paul is determined to raise the bar for us to the glory of Christ and our own joy.

15. I want you to notice that beginning with

verse 5 Paul is going to warn us of no less than 11 sins Christians are susceptible to. Can you guess why that list follows his command to NOT set our minds on the things of earth?

16. Perhaps it's because under all such sin is a mind that is full of the earth, full of the world, full of things that feed the flesh. And perhaps it was because Solomon learned by experience the connection between the secret thoughts of the mind and the trajectory of life that he cautioned his sons (Prov. 4:23) saying, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life."

17. You see, beloved, when it comes to sin, no one falls far. Occasionally we hear about a celebrity pastor or a best-selling Christian author whose sexual sin or financial embezzlement suddenly comes to light. It ruins his marriage. It ruins his ministry. It ruins his reputation. In such cases people sometimes exclaim, "Wow! How could that brother have fallen SO far so fast? But the reality is, he didn't fall far. In his MIND he had been nurturing sexual sin or the love of money where he thought no one would ever know. But "Time and truth go hand in hand. Given enough time, the truth will come out."<sup>3</sup>

18. Do you want to experience true Christian flourishing and avoid the disastrous consequences of sin? Then watch over your secret thoughts. Become "heart smart." When you find yourself tempted, ask "What is my heart thinking about? When you are alone with your own thoughts ask yourself: How can I engage my mind in things above rather than the things of earth?"

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<sup>3</sup> I owe this thought to John MacArthur who has often made such statements over his many years of ministry.

19. More simply, where do I get spiritual thoughts? That's a good question. Thankfully, the answer isn't complicated. We get spiritual thoughts from the bible. For example, Col. 1:15-20, "He is the image of the invisible God..." Spiritual thoughts come from meditating on specific scriptures.

- What are you thankful for?
- What personal struggle requires God's wisdom?
- For what do you think God has been worthy of my worship in the past 24 hours?
- What wisdom do I need for the next decision?
- What wisdom do I need to encourage someone else?
- And as you engage your mind in spiritual thoughts, you will find yourself speak to God about them. You will find yourself seeking Christ as a result of setting your mind on Christ. And that is the very core of Christianity.

20. At the end of Paul's exhortation here, he offers us the basis or reasons, for telling us to set our minds on things above. Specifically, he offers bases three things: a past reality, and present truth, and a future expectation.

- A. First: (3) A past reality: "For you have died." Gal. 6:14 "the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." In other words, because of Christ's atoning work on my behalf, sin no longer has dominion over me. Whenever I give into temptation, I do something I didn't have to do. Why? Because in Christ, I have died to the power of sin.

I heard Steve Lawson this week tell a story of a couple teenaged girls who enjoyed attending raunchy drunken parties with their friends. But one day they both bowed before Christ and trusted him as their Lord and Savior. Shortly afterward, they were invited again to one of those parties, but the girls responded by email saying, "We regret that we will not be able to attend your party this week because we have recently died.

You see, unbelievers can't know the joy of relishing the glory of Christ. The reason you do have that privilege is because you have died to sin and to the world. Who is there to rob you of such delight? A mind set on Christ is the healthiest, most joyful mind a human can have. And it is yours for the taking if you are in Christ.

- B. The second basis is a Present Truth (3); namely, that “your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” The word “hidden” carries the idea of protection from harm, a place of safety, a refuge. Because you are In Christ, you are under his constant care. You are secure. In fact, you are doubly secure! Paul says, you are hidden with Christ - in God.

This is reminiscent of John 10:28–30 where Jesus says, “I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” You are doubly secure!

“Hidden can also mean “hidden from sight.” Your unbelieving friends don't understand you because they cannot see the real but invisible relationship you have with Christ. But one day that will all change. And that brings us to...

- C. The Third basis (4) points to our future expectation; namely, When Christ is revealed, you will be revealed with him in glory. Those who have lived their entire lives denying the reality of the living Christ will discover – to their everlasting shame – that they had played the fool all their lives. One day the invisible will become visible. On that day, every eye will see Him. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

21. And if that is all true (and it is!) then we have good reason to discipline ourselves every day to set our minds on things above and not on the things of earth.

22. How do you cultivate a mind that gravitates back to the blazing center of Christianity where Christ is?

- Spend time with God.
- Read his word.
- Meditate on his truth.
- Talk about it with your friends.
- Become heart-smart – i.e. become aware of where your heart is leading your mind and forcefully bring it back into its proper orbit around the Christ.

23. Copernicus discovered the key to the solar system when he began orienting his thinking away from earth and on to the Sun. Similarly, those who wish to discover the key to Christian flourishing, must focus their orientation toward the blazing center of all things where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. When our hearts are fixed on Him, everything else finds its proper orbit. So...

- A. Keeping seeking Christ.
- B. Keep setting your minds on Christ.