

7-31-22

Sermon- What Are You Thinking?

Scripture- Colossians 3: 1-11, CTW- Ps 107: 1-9

Hymns- 766, 237, 395

Theme- In this passage, Paul tells the church in Colosse that they need to spend time thinking about who they were and who they had become. When they see things in themselves that do not line up with the things of Christ, they are to "put to death" the earthly parts of their lives and change their focus. So, what do you think?

I. Introduction: The first two chapters of this letter focused on the person of Christ. It is Paul's belief that if we get Christ right we get everything else right.

The second half of the letter is dedicated to ethics, the practical implications and applications of life in Christ. Thus the focus moves from doctrine to ethics, from principle to practice, from the universal to the particular, from the indicative to the imperative, from "is" to "ought."

A. In simple terms, it's a "how to letter!"

Paul's moral teaching is based on the fundamental principle that Christians are dead and newly risen people. They therefore must behave in a new and different way.

They are to become in this world what they already are through Baptism in the "world to come," the new creation. They are to do good works not in order to be saved, **but because they already have been saved.**

Ethics, then, is gratitude. And "salvation," although grammatically a noun, is a verb with three tenses: **a past event**, meaning that it depends upon the cross and so is already accomplished. A new seed of life has been implanted in us at Baptism, **a present**

experience; as such it mingles with our experience of personal sinfulness and a sinful world. God's grace is necessary to daily overcome the pull of the "flesh.", and a **future blessing**, fully real in eternity, but not yet fully realized in time.

As the ultimate purpose of history we must still await a Savior **Philippians 3:20** by whom we shall be saved **Romans 5:9**. Paul intermingles these three perspectives when he gives moral teaching.

B. In verse one, "If then you were raised with Christ," this past event, has practical implications for the present lives of every Christian.

Seek what is above: This **past event** and our incorporation into it through Baptism gives us real communion with the crucified and risen Lord, but it also requires a **new lifestyle** corresponding to this new status.

This is Paul's version of the Lord's teaching in **Matthew 6:21**: "Where your treasure is, there also will be your heart." This is the present dimension of salvation, requiring a new outlook, attitude, perspective and quest with Christ as our focus.

C. In verse two, "think of what is above," Paul knew that "above" was a mental spiritual dimension, again, he is using figurative language, not a physical direction. The word "think" is one of Paul's favorite words for attitude, mindset, perspective. This is a perspective above that of the realm of the principalities and powers, the sometimes-evil spirits that seek to rule the universe. This is the perspective of God's realm. The earthbound perspective is without lasting substance.

D. In verses three and four, "before you accept Christ, your real life is hidden...when Christ appears in your life...the real you will appear," It is the province of Christ's Spirit, living and active within us, to reproduce his likeness increasingly, **one degree at a time, as 2 Cor 3:18 puts it, "in our lives"**. True, the consummation awaits the day of Christ, but

the brightness, glory or increasing “obviousness” **is happening in front of earthly eyes as well.** The day of glory may be future but its arrival is as sure as if it were already here.

II. Paul Then States What Should Be Obvious to Every Christian: That We Are Called To Live A Life of RESPONSE!

A. In verse five he states “put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly,” having lain out the general principle of morality- seek the things above. Paul turns to the practical applications of that principle. He begins with the basic requirement.

The Christian has died; he or she should make sure he/ or she is completely dead. By this Paul means the Christian is to respond to the constant presence of Christ in our lives by letting go of the old, letting go and letting God be God, stop trying to hang on to the former life and its ways.

Christians are “dead to the world” and should behave that way. This is no mere figure of speech; it is a real event, a fact, a fact now of new life.

Practically, it is a lifelong process. This is another form of Jesus’ teaching **Matthew 5:29-30**, where he metaphorically said the offending foot, hand or eye should be cut off.

Paul is not advocating a hatred for the human body or things earthly in and of themselves. It is only in so far as these realities have been invaded and taken over by evil that they are to be either shunned or re-conquered and re-possessioned.

B. In verses five to nine, Paul uses the terms “immorality and evil desire,” Paul moves from the externally visible form of sexual sin “immorality” translates the word for “fornication,” a broad term including traffic with prostitutes and intercourse within the forbidden degrees of affinity, to the invisible root cause , **“evil desire,”** much as Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus traced murder back to the

angry thought and adultery back to the lustful glance **Matthew 5:21-29.**

Paul refers to the greed that is idolatry: Greed, the inordinate desire for material wealth, with disregard for the needs and rights of others, is seen as a dangerous form of idolatry, extinguishing one's desire for God and clogging the heart. **See Luke 12: 13-21.**

Also, in 1 Timothy 6:10 it is even considered the root of all evil. These two vices, impurity and greed fundamentally, in all their various forms, cover the whole domain of human selfishness.

Paul then refers to Circumcision and uncircumcision: This represents religious prejudice of the time and is frequently equated with racial prejudice. Even some Jewish Christians still erroneously thought of themselves as superior to those uncircumcised. Old habits of thought as well as action die hard.

Next Paul says Slave or free: As a social institution nothing was more taken for granted than slavery, a normal and necessary state of affairs, the result of war, tradition and inequality of destiny and heredity.

While this remained as an "earthly" and social distinction, it did not prevent slaves from becoming leaders in the church and over freemen who might, outside the church, be their very masters.

All this is changed in Christ and "the things above." Christians were to think and act differently from pagans or Jews.

III. What Paul Would Have Us Remember Above All is that Christians live in the one and only world, but on two levels simultaneously: the spiritual and the fleshly, the heavenly and the earthly. These are not two different places or locations, but two different dimensions of the same locality, the same reality.

A. Faith in Christ has given us access into his eternal realm. While we still live in the mortal body, our old hereditary nature still pines for and is prone to return to the “old ways” of perceiving, thinking, doing, experiencing, evaluating and enjoying.

It is like a dormant force or virus ready to spring to life again whenever the opportunity presents itself.

If the Christian lets down his or her guard, loses focus, drifts away from the discipline of Christian living, it will rear its ugly head.

What is the remedy? Paul says it is Attitude! Think of the “things above.” Above where? Above the earthbound values we have inherited from our culture and families.

The things we took for granted were the keys to life, the means to happiness.

When we accepted Christ we saw them for what they were- the things below, below us, below the dignity bestowed upon us by the free grace of God, below what we can become.

B. We are to keep our sights on, focus our attention on, Christ. There’s the remedy for backsliding, relapse, becoming enrolled once again as a slave, a member of the old creation.

And make no mistake about it, the old creation will always take us back, provided we accept its terms. The “old life” works to lure in the prey, promising the world, the old world, the one no one would really want if he or she could see it from the perspective of Christ and the new creation.

But we are to put off these things, these old habits, and discard them much as we would a suit that no longer fits us. Who would squeeze into a suit too small for him or her? Only one who has no choice. **But we do have a choice and the constant asking ourselves “What is my attitude?” reveals the choices.**

It also reveals that many of our inherited prejudices against groups of people and, so, people themselves, are also too small for us and make us small.

C. We should have outgrown all of it in and through Christ. The perspective of the new creation, from above, sheds new and generous light on everything and everyone.

We know there is a boundary between one **WAY** and another In the new **WAY**, the new creation we speak with a different language and assign different degrees of value to things.

There are certain behaviors and attitudes that were acceptable in the old **WAY**, but no longer are appropriate in this new land of love.

Yet, we are aware that we frequently pine for the good old days and, not so, good old **ways**.

Paul's message here then is that on purpose we must catch ourselves and set our hearts on the higher things, the new things, on Christ.

The concrete actions that flow from this sort of life are the very stuff that attracts others to enroll in the new creation whereby we become the image of the Creator he originally intended all of us to be.

Sin and addiction first stained that image and finally took over our lives completely, but thanks to Christ he has brought us back. We are dead to this world in so far as sin. Paul says to us, "Let's keep it that way."

IV. Paul Concludes By Reminding Us that Our union with Christ will only be complete in heaven, at the "right hand of God." Between Baptism and Heaven we must actively seek to become while still on earth what we are already in heaven's eyes.

The heavenly vision, the very vision of Christ, lights up and identifies sin for what it is, even as it identifies us for who and what we are.

A. The old ways of living are like dormant viruses waiting to become active as soon as we lose focus and discipline. Paul paints a New Brain versus Old Brain picture here.

For instance, Greed is a form of idolatry by worshiping something other than God.

Deceiving ourselves with self-denial, and deceiving others is the sure sign of **BACK-SLIDING**. We know that term well!

In the vision of Christ people are different, even unique, but not superior to other humans, except morally.

The **old brain** asks the question, "What is my feeling?" and the **new brain** should ask, "What is my attitude?"

Once the old brain gets the answer, it reacts. It is a slave to the answer.

Once the new brain gets the answer, it decides whether the answer is appropriate to the **full picture of the reality of Christ in our lives** and not just the feelings that accompany the first impression.

The new brain does something the old brain cannot do: it deliberates and decides. It **responds and acts**, rather than reacts.

B. The new creation of which Christians speak actually began long before the birth of Jesus. It goes all the way back to the birth or emergence of the new brain.

At that point humans were born and became capable of knowing God's vision and version of reality, became not only conscious but self-conscious, if you will.

Without the new brain the old one rules. With its X-rated vision it gives sex and sexual matters and topics a priority, a primacy, really, that it does not have in the new brain perspective.

Here, everything is evaluated and valued in terms of the self-preservation and self-pleasure of the individual.

While this works perfectly well for the animal world, it has proven to be rather disastrous as the fundamental operating principle of the human world.

So, after giving us a chance to figure it all out for ourselves, God became one of us in Christ so that we would be able to see things from his point of view and also have the **power available** to us to over-rule the old brain, to correct its errors and to enter into a healthy and life-producing union with all other humans, humans we did not produce, humans who need not be our enemies or our tools or toys.

Paul wants all Christians to ask the question: **What is My Attitude?** We have little or no say over most of the circumstances of our life and none over the physical, biological and chemical laws of nature.

We also cannot help how we feel.

But we do have a say over what our attitude and response toward all should and will be. Paul wants us to know that real Freedom lies in exercising our right to decide what our attitude will be toward our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the God who sent him to us that we might have **real life** and have it in **abundance**.

Amen? Let us pray...