

Set Your Mind on the Things Above, Put off the Old Man, and Put on The New Man

I've always struggled to enter into the apostle Paul's thinking in Colossians 3. Then writing this book caused me to struggle with that again. When Paul says "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" my mind would sort of go blank, even though I knew Christ is there, seated above at the right hand of God, and even that I died and my life has been hidden with Christ in God.

What I've come to see is that I missed a connection with verses that open the book as well as the contrast between earthly things Paul warns them about in Chapter 2 with the heavenly Christ at the right hand of God. The contrast between the old man we once were without God versus the new man we are in Christ and things we need to keep putting off and on is also related to setting our mind on the things that are above versus the things on earth.

Please reread Colossians 3 and see if you have the same struggle, and whether the following comments help your understanding.

Paul opened the book with the following. Highlights are mine:

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the **hope laid up for you in heaven**, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth ; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And **although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was**

proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.” (Colossians 1:1-23)

In Chapter 2 Paul had already warned them not to be defrauded by “elementary principles of the world, as if you were living in the world” and that in Christ we have already been “circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands and buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” Then Chapter 3 begins with “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”. With these I began to make the connections. The things which are on earth are the things of the world that we are now dead to through Christ’s death and should no longer occupy our minds with because while “These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

So setting our mind on the things which are above is not being empty-headed, rather it is to fill our minds with (set our minds on) the things where Christ is seated at the right hand of God including Him, our king, the firstborn of all creation, the head of the body (the church) and Christ in you our hope that includes “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory”.

Setting our mind on the things which are above and not the things on the earth also includes what Paul says later in Chapter 3: “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.” The words “earthly body” help me make the connection. Earthly things are “immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed” plus “lying to each other”. These are the things of “the old man you laid aside” that we should “consider ourselves dead to”. Earthly things also include “anger, wrath, malice, slander *and* abusive speech”. Heavenly things are the things of the new man that is being renewed to true knowledge we are to put on that include “a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other plus “love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” The connections are thus complete for me. Now I know what seeking and setting my mind on the things above looks like, and what the new man and old man are!

Perhaps you are reading a translation that uses the word self rather than man. I’ll talk more about that and the implications of the Greek word translated “man” or “self” in a later chapter because that is worth discussing and thinking about in more depth.

