

SET OUR HEARTS ON THINGS ABOVE

Colossians 3:1-17 (Key Verse 1)

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

In today’s passage we will learn from Apostle Paul how we should live our lives practically as Christian believers. From the key verse Apostle Paul urged the Colossian believers to set their hearts on things above. We are therefore going to learn what does it mean to set our hearts on things above, why we should set our hearts on things above and how can we practically set our hearts on things above. To help us set our hearts on things above, Apostle exhorts us to put to death our earthly nature and to cloth ourselves with God’s nature. I pray that God may have mercy on us all today to receive one word, be changed and fully set our hearts on things above.

Let us read, **verse 1-2**: *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”* Apostle Paul’s first words in this chapter is: *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ”* Through this, Apostle Paul confirms and emphasizes the fact that we died together with Christ Jesus and we were raised together with him. So, when we believe that indeed Christ is our Lord and Savior, we are automatically united with him in his death and resurrection. Jesus died on the cross for the sins all human beings, his death has power to conquer the power of sin and death. When Jesus died on the cross, he said it is finished, meaning the power of sin and death is no more. Jesus gave his sinless body in our place. Before we used to live under the power of sin and death, we were controlled by it and ruled by it. We were tormented by sin, yet we could not escape it, we served it and lived for it. But through Jesus’ death, we too died with him and rose with him, meaning we now have a new life. A new life, no longer subjected to the power of sin and death; we are a new being in Christ Jesus.

What should we do then, as new beings in Christ Jesus, how should our new life be like? We should *“set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, we should set our minds on things above, not on earthly things.”* As new beings in Christ Jesus we should first surrender our lives to Jesus, we should focus on him and live according to his will and purpose, we should fully commit our trust in him. Jesus is worthy of our trust, he is God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, because of him the power of sin and death is no more. Apostle Paul emphasized once again that we should set our minds on things above and not earthly things. In **Matthew 16:23** it says: *“Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”* This happened after Jesus shared with the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, teachers of the law and chief priests, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. When Simon Peter, heard Jesus mentioning death, he was hugely disturbed, because he had earthly concerns in his mind. He was only concerned about being at the right hand of Jesus and ruling the people of the world, he was concerned about early positions and respect. He did not humble himself to see the great work of God, that is underway through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And so, Jesus rebuked him harshly saying: *“...you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”*

Many Christian believers today and in history, have fallen because they set their minds and hearts on earthly things and not on things above. Apostle mentions minds and hearts, because everything begins there. Before we commit sin, we first think about it, then it goes to our hearts and then we are done. Even though people confess that they are saved, they continued to set their hearts on earthly things. The issue is because of ignorance that in Christ we have a new life. People just say they are saved but they still continue to live in their old being. In **verse 3** it says: *“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”* In Christ our old being is no more, we have a new life, a life that is now hidden with Christ in God. And this life is under new rules and principles, no longer under the old way of living.

What are the new rules and principles? Does it mean we should forget all earthly things and live like a monk and not associate with the world at all? No, setting our minds and hearts on things above does not mean we ignore our basic human obligations such studying, getting a job raising family etc. But rather it means we should not bound ourselves to earthly life. We should pursue higher goals, a higher quality of life as new creatures in Christ Jesus, that is set our hearts on things above. We should not seek to gain the world, but rather the kingdom of God. In **verse 4** it says: *“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

But how can we practically live this new life today? Firstly, we can practically live this new life in Christ by putting to death our earthly nature. Let us look at **verse 5-6**: *“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.”* Here Apostle gave us a list of the earthly things which are a matter of life and death. Sadly, these are normalized even among Christian believers, being sexually involved before marriage is no strange thing, greed is seen as ambition to achieve great things. However, the Bible says: *“Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.”* As Christian believers saved by the blood of Jesus, given a new life in Jesus we need to put to death this earthly nature. When I was still a student on campus, my mind and heart was filled with so much sin, sexual immorality. At the time I could not act on it because I was afraid, I will fail and drop out. So, I focused on completing my studies so that I can enjoy my life when I graduate. When I graduated I had so much money to do anything, to a point where I fell into sexual sin, however instead of being happy and satisfied, I became a slave of sin. But glory to God for using Sh. Jacob and Sh. Rebekah, they patiently planted the word of Jesus in my heart revealing to me that I am saved by the blood of Jesus. They revealed to me that in Jesus I have a new life, they eagerly urged me to put death my earthly nature, for in Jesus I have a new life. They eagerly urged me to set my heart on things above. And since then my life changed, yes to my school mates I became boring because of my changed life. But I was happy, I was happy because I lived each day for Jesus, and I felt his provision and protection each day.

Yes, it is very difficult to put to death this earthly nature, it was difficult for me, it still difficult even today, after all it was our nature for a long time. But as Christian believers we need to do it, and we can do it in Christ who is one with us. We should do it because it is a serious thing before God, it says the *“Because of these the wrath of God is coming.”* There is no time, we need to repent and put to death the earthly nature. Furthermore, Apostle mentioned in **verse 8-9** saying: *“But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. / Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices”* This time Apostle Paul mentions things that seem somewhat light, things that seem somewhat acceptable. But as children of God, saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, we must put to death even these things, we must put to the death lies, we should not get angry, we should not use filthy language, slander and malice. Anger is the root of many sins. Some people harbor bitterness in their hearts, even for years, which suddenly erupts in fits of rage. Many murders have been committed because of this. Malice is to hate someone to the point of harming them. Slander is to assassinate someone’s character by means of false testimony and rumors. Looking at this, we can see that these things are not light at all, for they have severe results. So as children of God we should love one another and put to death such practices.

But how can we put death this earthly nature? Let us look at **verse 10**: *“and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”* Apostle Paul says, it is possible to put to death our earthly nature when we fill our hearts with the knowledge of our creator Jesus Christ. When we know the character and power of Jesus Christ who created the heavens and the earth, who conquered the power of sin and death on the cross. In our ministry we are blessed with the privilege of deep Bible studies and testimony writing each week. Let us put to heart our Bible study preparations and testimony writing, let us meditate daily on the word of God. It is through these sincere preparations that we can be strengthened put to death our earthly nature and set our hearts on things above.

Secondly, we can practically live this new life in Christ by clothing ourselves with God’s nature. Let us look at **verse 12-14**: *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. / Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. / And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”* Here Apostle confirmed and emphasized once again our new identity in Christ. Because of Jesus we have been restored as God’s people, holy and dearly loved. In the past we were not God’s people, we belonged to sin and death, we submitted to them and we were ruled by them. But God in his great mercy forgave all our sins and made us his precious, holy children who are dearly loved. So as God’s children who are dearly loved, we must live accordingly, we must assume the nature of God, our inner character must reflect the character of God. We must clothe ourselves with God’s nature.

God's character is marked by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Compassion is to share others' inner struggle and agony. Kindness is to do good for others unconditionally. Humility is to acknowledge God as God and to respect others more than oneself. Gentleness is revealed through Jesus who was born in a manger, giving room for all people to come to him, so like Jesus we too should be gentle. We should also be patient, wait quietly without anger.

Generally, at work I am very helpful to others even our customers, so sometime last year one of my colleagues asked me why I keep helping people even those who just seem to be using me and not grateful. He suggested that sometimes I should just hold back. At the time I did not know what to say to him, I was thinking that it is my nature, I always try to help others. But today when I think about it with reference to God's word, I can see that I am who I am at work because of Jesus. By the grace of God, the word of Jesus has been slowly working in my heart clothing my sinful body with the nature of God. Don't get me wrong, I am not perfect, but I am encouraged to see God working in my life through his word. I pray that I may humbly acknowledge God's power in my life, study his word all the more, put to death my earthly self and be clothed with the nature of God.

Furthermore, we can clothe ourselves with the nature of God by bearing with one another and forgiving one another. We all have strong points and weak points, and they are all different, and because of this, one way or the other we will clash. So we should bear with one another and forgive one another. But how can we do this? We can do it when we remember the love of God, because of the love of God we were saved, we were changed. So in the same way, as children of God we should exercise love to one another. In **verse 14** it says: *"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."* Without love we cannot be united, without love we cannot accept one another.

Furthermore, we can clothe ourselves with the nature of God by having peace with one another as Christian believers, and this a different kind of peace from that of the world. In this world there is so many things going on such as war in Ukraine, now Israel and Palestine, many forces across world tried many things to restore peace, but still no success. This means in this world there is no true peace, true peace is found in Jesus Christ. In **verse 15a** it says: *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. As Christian believers we should look at Jesus the Prince of Peace, allow his peace to rule in our hearts, and only then we can have peace with one another."*

Lastly, we can clothe ourselves with the nature of God by being thankful. In **verse 15b-17** it says: *"And be thankful. / Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." / And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* In this world there many things going on, recently in South Africa load shedding has just been on the rise, the economy has gone out of hand, the interest rate has just skyrocketed, government service delivery is just so bad. People who do bad things just get away with them. In these circumstances it seems it's just so difficult to be thankful. This coming week we will be having an opening academy to share our thanksgiving testimonies, but how can we be thankful when we had such a tough year last year? Firstly, we should be thankful because as Christian believer it should be our nature to be thankful, also when we let the word of God dwell richly in our hearts, we can be thankful. When the word of God dwells in our hearts, it will open our eyes and set our hearts on things above. We will see Jesus who was with us and is with us, strengthening us and granting us assurance of the kingdom of heaven.

Conclusion

From today's passage, we have learnt that as Christian believers saved by the blood of Jesus, we should set our minds and hearts on Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who has granted us a new life in him, we should live for his glory according to his will and purpose. We have learnt that in this new life in Christ Jesus we should put to death our earthly nature, repent from our sinful nature, and clothe ourselves with the nature of God. We have learnt that we can do this when we allow the word of Jesus to dwell richly in our hearts, through the study of the Bible, testimony writing and meditation on God's word.