

Paul's Letter to the Colossian Church
Lesson 2

Set Your Mind on the Things Above

Col. 3:¹If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Where is Christ? Here Paul gives the answer. Christ is at the right hand of God the Father and that is His anointed place. To the Colossians the Lord is saying to "keep seeking the things above," to keep seeking the Lord Jesus Christ who is above, at the right hand of God. This is all because of your relationship with Christ, His death on the cross, His burial and resurrection. Those who have this relationship with Christ have been raised up with Him.

Col. 3:²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Not only are the Colossians to seek the things above, but they are to "set their mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Here is where the letter to the Colossians is different from the letter to the Ephesians. The focus in this letter is to focus on "your future with Christ in eternity." Yes we have to live in this world and maneuver all the hurdles of this world but all along the way the fact of eternity with Christ is to be prevalent in all our thoughts. Never forget that when the time comes you will be with Christ in glory!

Col. 3:⁵Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, ⁷and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth.

Because we are to seek the things above we are to make sure that we stay far away from all forms of idolatry in this life here on earth. This is nothing new for the child of God. There are things that we must put off as Christians in this life. IDOLATRY is image-worship or divine honor paid to any created object. Paul describes the origin of idolatry in Romans 1:21-25 where men forsook God, and sank into ignorance and moral corruption. The forms of idolatry are:

- (1.) Fetishism, or the worship of trees, rivers, hills, stones, etc.
- (2.) Nature worship, the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, as the supposed powers of nature.
- (3.) Hero worship, the worship of deceased ancestors, or of heroes.

In Scripture, idolatry is of heathen origin, and as being imported among the Hebrews through contact with heathen nations such as the Canaan, Egyptians etc. The first allusion to idolatry is in the account of Rachel stealing her father's teraphim in Genesis 31:19, which were the relics of the worship of other gods. During their long residence in Egypt the Hebrews fell into idolatry with not only the worship of other god, but also incorporating idolatry practices such as fasting

into their worship. Many a token of God's displeasure fell upon them because of this sin. The idolatry learned in Egypt was probably rooted out from among the people during the forty years' wanderings; but when the Jews entered Palestine, they came into contact with the monuments and associations of the idolatry of the old Canaanite races again and showed a constant tendency to depart from the living God and follow the idolatrous practices of those heathen nations. It was their great national sin, which was only effectually rebuked by the Babylonian exile. But the results of the exile was only temporary as the Jews quickly fell back into the same sin within a generation after returning to the land.

The first and second commandments are directed against idolatry of every form. The individual offender was devoted to destruction. His nearest relatives were not only bound to denounce him and deliver him up to punishment, but their hands were to strike the first blow when, on the evidence of two witnesses at least, he was stoned. To attempt to seduce others to false worship was a crime of equal enormity. An idolatrous nation shared the same fate. No facts are more strongly declared in the Old Testament than that the extermination of the Canaanites was the punishment for their idolatry, and that the calamities of the Israelites were due to the same cause. A city guilty of idolatry was looked upon as a cancer in the state; it was considered to be in rebellion, and treated according to the laws of war. Its inhabitants and all their cattle were put to death. On taking possession of the land, the Jews were commanded to destroy all traces of every kind of the existing idolatry of the Canaanites, a command that was not fulfilled.

In the New Testament the term idolatry is used to designate covetousness which includes immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed. These are all idolatrous acts and the child of God shall not participate in these acts. Laying aside the old self to be part of the Christ's resurrection and salvation demands that you abstain from these five sins associated with idolatry.

Col. 3:⁹Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him ¹¹*a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Having a new life in Christ also incorporates laying aside "lying" to one another. When we lie to one another we are simply continuing in the evil practices of the old life without Christ. As a new creature in Christ we are to seek the things above which means that we take the high road. Just as Christ died for all, we are to accept all in a renewed true knowledge. We are to look at others with a Christ-like mindset.

Col. 3:¹²And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴And beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

In contrast to the things that must be put off, found in the list above starting in 3:8, here we see the things that we must put on as Christians. As a new creature, living in Christ

with our minds set on the things above, we are to exhibit certain traits as we live here on earth as if we are already in glory with Christ. Here are the traits:

1. Heart of compassion = This is a pity for those who are without Christ and in need of mercy.
2. Heart of kindness = This is a moral excellence found in our demeanor towards others.
3. Heart of humility = This is a modesty of putting others before ourselves.
4. Heart of gentleness = This is controlling our actions in a meek manner to display our true character of strength under control.
5. Heart of patience = This is the fortitude and forbearance to wait upon the Lord for His direction, guidance, and provision.
6. Bearing with one another = This is “putting up with” and “enduing” those who live and work within your circle of life.
7. Forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you = This is graciously granting a pardon for those who have sinned against you.
8. *Put on love*, which is the perfect bond of unity = This is that wonderful love that is seen in 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Cor. 13:1-13 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2**And if I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3**And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. **4**Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, **5**does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, **6**does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; **7**bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **8**Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away. **9**For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; **10**but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. **11**When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. **12**For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. **13**But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Col. 3:15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Everything in this life does not go as planned, but as Christian we are to let the “peace of Christ rule in our hearts.” This is difficult when we are living in a world that continues to live their lives in immorality, impurity, evil desires, passion, and greed. When you have done your part to pay the premiums on an insurance policy through the years and now the time has come to collect and the insurance company does not fulfill its agreement and shorts the check, you

still have to live in the “peace of Christ.” When the employer fails to cover your out of pocket expenses that are required to keep the job and do your work, you still have to live in the “peace of Christ.” When all forms of evil is spewed from family members when all they care about is the “money” instead of the person who needs to be cared for, you still must live in the “peace of Christ.” When it looks like your entire future has been changed for the worse, you must live in the “peace of Christ.” Whatever comes your way you must be thankful for what Christ has done for you and you must keep your eyes on the things above and not on the things of this world.

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. **17** And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

We have been provided with a record that provides the word of Christ for our daily needs. We are to let those words dwell within our lives. Christ’s words bring wisdom to our lives here on earth. They allow us to live in the “peace of Christ.” In doing this we gather together with others who have the same struggles and the same burdens of trying to live as Christians in this world of sin. Together we are to come and worship, raising our voices with true thankfulness in our hearts to God. Everything we do, we do for the glory of Christ who has died for us and set our minds on things above and the glory that is promised in our eternity.

Col. 3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Just as in the letter to the Ephesians, the Lord gives instructions to the Colossians in the most venerable areas of life for the Christian here on earth. Let us quickly summarize what we discovered in our study of the letter to the Ephesians. For a greater look at this section, refer and compare it to the Ephesians notes.

The word “subject” is a military term that means to “be in line with. Here, it is fitting for the wife to “be in line with the husband.”

Col. 3:19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.

Husbands are instructed to love their wives because this is difficult for them to do. In the culture of the 60’s AD, wives were viewed as property and a symbol of wealth. While this was the world’s view, Christian men still lived in the world and were to treat their wives with love and not as the world treated wives.

Col. 3:20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

Children who were not of the age to take spouses were to be obedient to the parents in all things.

Col. 3:21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.

Children were not to be exasperated by their fathers. Here it means that the fathers were not to nag the children, letting children be children while they are young and only expecting actions from them that are appropriate for their age.

Col. 3:22Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **23**Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. **25**For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

Employees are to be good employees, working hard for their employers as if they were working for the Lord Jesus Christ. The way you work as an employee will also determine some of the blessings and rewards of your eternal inheritance in glory. What a thought!

Col. 4:1Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Employers are to treat their workers right in all things. Justice and fairness are the two areas that employees are found to be the most unhappy! Employers must be just and fair with all.

Col. 4:2Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving; **3**praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; **4**in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

As in the letters to the Ephesians, Paul wants the Colossians to keep a right attitude and pray for themselves, but Paul also wants the Colossians to pray for him and those who are with him. Paul has many that he needs to present the gospel to, those who need the Lord, those who are outsiders to the Christian world. Specifically here, Paul is speaking of the Gentiles who need the Lord. The mystery of Christ is that He died for not only the Jews but also the Gentiles.

Col. 4:5Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

Outsiders are always among us and we must make the most of every opportunity with them. What does this mean? In the context of this passage the instruction is that we make the most of every opportunity to share the mystery of Christ with the outsiders, which is a reference to those who are not Christian.

Col. 4:6Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, *as it were*, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

As we speak with the outsiders, our speech is to be with “grace, seasoned with salt.” This is the way we are to speak with outsiders. What does this mean? It means that we must speak with

a gracious tone and temperament seasoned with prudence or sense. In other words, what we say to those who are outsiders of Christ, must make sense so that they will find confidence in Him through our words and behavior.

Col. 4:⁷As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know *about* our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

Just as in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul does not write much about his own circumstances but he has sent both Tychicus and Onesimus to fill them in on all that is going on with Paul personally. These were details that had no eternal worth for you and I yet many in those days knew Paul and were constantly wondering what was going on with him in Rome. Tychicus delivered the letter to the Ephesians. Here he is accompanied by Onesimus, who was the center of attention in Paul's letter to Philemon found in our New Testament. Onesimus had been a run away slave who ended up in prison with Paul and came to the Lord. Paul sent him home to Philemon because he belonged to Philemon as a slave, bought and paid for! Paul asks Philemon to send him back to Rome so Onesimus could serve him and evidently Philemon did just that. On this trip, Onesimus was sent back to his home with Tychicus to deliver the letter from Paul. I am sure that it was a joy for the church in Colossae to see Onesimus continuing in the faith as a servant of the Lord.

Col. 4:¹⁰Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also* Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹and *also* Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

In closing, Paul mentions three friends and fellow workers who are either Jews or were converts to the Jewish faith before becoming Christians. These three fellow workers are with him in Rome. They are Aristarchus, John Mark, and Justus. Little is known about Aristarchus except that he is from Macedonia. John Mark was of course the young man who had a falling out with Paul in the early years and has now been restored to a useful service in Paul's ministry. Quite possible Justus was the same Justus who was a Jewish proselyte who lived in Corinth. His home was next door to the synagogue and Paul would hold Sunday worship in his home following his reasoning in the synagogue each Saturday.

Col. 4:¹²Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

Most likely Epaphras had been the pastor at the church in Colossae for he had led many of them to the Lord according to the earlier portion of this letter. This is also supported by Paul's mentioning him in the letter to Philemon. Epaphras is constantly and earnestly praying for the Colossians. Without a doubt, they are his people.

Col. 4:¹³For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Epaphras' concern for Colossae is also found in his concern for the other two cities in the tri-city area on the Lycus River. It is within these three cities that the birth of Gnosticism begins. While this is not mentioned by Paul, directly by name, looking back at history points to these cities as the birthplace of this great apostasy belief system. The concern is great and rightfully so!

Col. 4:¹⁴Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also* Demas.

The constant aide to Paul is there with him. Luke is always with Paul in the background. Sometimes he is called Luscious, but it is the same person.

Col. 4:¹⁵Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

Nympha is a person who had opened their home to be the place of meeting for the church in Laodicea. Here, the NASB refers to this person being a "her." The King James uses the masculine, making it a "him." The original word does not give us a clear clue as to whether it is a male or female. Regardless of the gender, this was the owner of the house where the Lord was worshiped in Laodicea.

Col. 4:¹⁶And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea.

In John's message to the Laodicean church (Rev 3:14-22), he speaks of the lukewarmness of Laodicea, that they were "neither cold nor hot" (vv. 15-16). This local allusion would have been clear to citizens of Laodicea, who knew of the cold, pure waters of nearby Colossae.



This letter was to be shared with the church in Laodicea. This was a common practice in the first century among the churches and was one of the main factors in the canonization of a letter as part of the New Testament. The letters that were widely circulated were canonized. The letters that were not widely circulated were not. The letters that we have that were not circulated do not have the same authority, flavor, theology, or content as those found in the New Testament.

The church in Colossae was to read the letter that was coming from Laodicea. This is an interesting verse and can be taken several ways. First, this can be understood that Paul wrote a letter to the Laodicean's that was not considered scripture and therefore was not included in the canon of the New Testament. However, Paul instructed the Colossians to read the letter, giving it some sense of authority that might give it credence to be considered scripture. Where is this letter and why do we not have it? Sure the Lord would not have allowed part of His Holy Word to be lost in the shuffle!

Secondly, this letter spoken of by Paul was probably not a letter written specifically to the Laodicean's, but it was one that was circling the churches to be read as scripture. Most likely it was the letter to the Ephesians' that Paul is speaking of since it contains so much of the same material found in this letter. Paul wanted to make sure the Colossians read that letter too since it would reinforce the Lord's message to them in this letter.

[Col. 4:17](#) And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

This reference to Archippus along with the reference to him in Philemon has led many writers to conclude that this was the son of Philemon who was a minister / church leader, of the church in Colossae. While his heritage cannot be verified, the fact remains that Paul is sending an encouragement to Archippus to keep his eyes fixed on the things above and fulfill the duties of the ministries for which he is serving.

[Col. 4:18](#) I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

So that all would know that this letter was truly from Paul, he picks up the quill and writes the logo which is at the end of every letter. The Logo is "Grace be with you!" We would call this an ending, but in Paul's day the greeting was put at the end and the salutation was put at the beginning. With a personal touch, Paul made sure the people would know that this was not a false letter. Paul was in chains in this imprisonment and I am sure that as he picked up the quill to write this last signature the chains surely clanged together as a constant reminder to him of his final circumstances.