

1. Col 3:1-4

- a. Where did Paul tell the Colossians to turn their attention? (3:1)
- b. What do you think it means when Paul says, "if you have been raised with Christ"? In what way are we "raised"?
- c. What does it mean to you to be "hidden with Christ in God"? How does this relate to "Setting your mind on things above"?
- d. "Set your mind on things above." What do you think this actually looks like in practice? What obstacles are there to practising this "heavenly mindfulness" in your daily life?

Paul exhorts us to "Set your mind on things above." This is by no means an easy task! **While people may control their actions and even manage their emotions, it is impossible for anyone to control their own thoughts.** External behaviors and attitudes can be modified or disguised through effort, but the mind and its intentions cannot be falsified. God is the One who examines the hearts of people; He knows every thought within. Human judgment is often based on outward behavior and appearances, making it inevitable for people to be deceived by external impressions. However, God's judgment is based on the thoughts and intentions of the heart, extending to every action and attitude. This world is filled with religions striving to change people's behavior, encouraging them to be good individuals or even contributors to society. Yet, they overlook the most crucial aspect of a person—their thoughts and intentions. No one can transform the inner thoughts of a person; neither idols nor any religion can reach that realm.

**Therefore, only God can transform the mind, and this becomes a defining characteristic of Christ's disciples.**

Our thoughts are renewed, and the things our hearts dwell on are completely different from before. From my personal experience, before I knew the Lord, my thoughts were almost entirely focused on how to achieve better grades. Alternatively, I would concentrate on how to improve my gaming skills or enhance my favorite sports and hobbies. Perhaps, apart from these, there was nothing else I would think about!

The thoughts we have in our minds are not totally wrong. After I started working, I also thought about how to do my job well and how to improve my skills. This, too, is part of God's will—He calls us to pursue excellence in our work and to faithfully accomplish everything He entrusts to us. However, the key point I want to emphasize is this: Are these the only things occupying your mind? Do these earthly matters dominate most of your thoughts? Do you find thinking about heavenly things boring, while thoughts about your work, hobbies, or studies suddenly excite you?

When you meditate on things above, do you experience a sense of fulfillment, or does it make you feel sleepy, as though you're wasting your time? If this is the case, then it's a clear indication that your thoughts are still focused on earthly things rather than on heavenly things!

Paul says: "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above." The transformation of your mind is the test for whether you have truly been raised with Christ. We must understand that Christ is not only the object of our faith but also the source of our new life. We are hidden in Christ. Although outwardly we may appear unchanged after believing in Him, our inner being has been transformed!

The old self no longer has control over us; we have become people who are raised with Christ. If someone has truly been raised with Christ, they will undoubtedly bear new life. This new life carries a new nature, and the fruit of this new nature is a change in our inner thoughts. In the past, spiritual matters held no appeal for me, but today, I find sweetness and fulfillment in contemplating spiritual things.

2. Col 3:5-11

- a. What evil activities does God seek to eliminate from our lives? (3:5)
- b. How is greed related to idolatry? (3:5)

- c. Why does reality so often seem to fall short of these ideals?
- d. What does it mean in common language that the new self is "being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator"?

The new life is God's initiative, but that doesn't mean we have no role to play in life transformation. Paul tells us to "put to death the earthly members" (sins), which is an intentional action on our part. This is done through the prompting and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to actively hate sin and strive with all our effort to rid ourselves of it. Therefore, we all bear the responsibility to deal with these sins! Many times, we neglect this responsibility due to our laziness, worries, love for the world, and so on—these things can hinder the progress of our spiritual life.

Paul goes on to list these sins: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed. The order of these sins progresses from actions to thoughts and then to nature. When sin manifests as outward behavior, it reveals that the evil thoughts within have been accumulating for some time. When we resolve to follow the Lord, these sinful actions should cease! However, the cleansing of inner thoughts takes time and is gradually accomplished by the Lord. Paul concludes with greed and adds an explanation that greed is idolatry. This is absolutely true. Idolatry does not merely mean that people do not know the true God; it is, in fact, driven by human greed. The essence of idolatry is self-worship and self-centeredness. People desire more wealth, more power, and more and more of everything. They always want what they should not have, and greed keeps them perpetually dissatisfied. As a result, idols are created, becoming the means through which they seek personal gain.

Paul also lists other sins in verse 8. These sins are different from those previously mentioned. The earlier sins primarily affect oneself and are direct offenses against God, while the sins listed in verse 8 directly offend others and, indirectly, God as well. These sins include anger, malice, slander, filthy language, and lies.

As true Christians, they must put off the old self and put on the new self. They are not only to stop sinning against God but also to avoid sinning against others. Only when disciples of Christ have their minds renewed and focused on heavenly things rather than earthly things can they stay away from all these sins.

But how exactly do we put off the old man and put on the new man? Verse 10 says: "*is being renewed to a full knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.*"

This new man does not instantly become strong; on the contrary, new life begins in weakness. Initially, we may fall far short of the ideal state Paul describes, and that is normal. However, true life does not stop growing. The only way for new life to grow is through God's Word, as the Holy Spirit works within. We need to know God more deeply, to have a fuller knowledge of Him, and to rely on Him in obedience. This is why reading Scripture, prayer, and meditation are so crucial. Without God's Word, the Holy Spirit will not work to grow your new life.

### 3. Col 3:12-17

- a. Can you identify any contrasts Paul makes between the old self and the new self in this passage?
- b. Which of the virtues require most effort for you?(3:12-13)
- c. How should life in Christ affect the way you treat others?
- d. In what ways can we actively put on the virtues mentioned in verses 12-14 in our daily lives?

All virtuous qualities are centered on one point: love—love for God and love for others. The law requires people to refrain from certain actions, but these are passive. Love, however, is active; it not only fulfills the requirements of the law but also achieves the true intent of the law.

New life creates a desire in a person to become a vessel in God's hands, ready to be used by Him. It inspires a longing to be a blessing to others and to bring them benefits that align with God's will. The source of love is God's love. We must come to know His love. As previously mentioned, we must grow in our knowledge of God. We need to see our own sin and God's love.

If we want to forgive, we must first see that we have been forgiven. If we want to stop complaining, we must first recognize God's grace. When we clearly see and deeply experience God's love for us in our lives, we are then able to love others. All of this can only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit working in us through God's Word.