

Keep Seeking Christ

Colossians 3:1-17

Key Verse: 3:1

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

The words “set your hearts” in verse 1 come from the Greek word “dzay-teho,” which means seeking in order to find out by thinking, meditating, reasoning, and inquiring into. Most versions of the Bible translate the phrase as “seek,” or “keep seeking.” So we made the title, “Keep Seeking Christ.” In the previous message we learned that just as we received Christ Jesus as Lord we must continue to live our lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith and overflowing with thankfulness. This is a wonderful key verse to guide our new lives in Christ. But the problem is that it is not easy to continue to live in him practically because sin is deeply rooted in our nature and character. Sometimes our enemies are outside, such as persecution, trials and hardship. But mostly our enemy is inside. Sins like selfishness, pride, lustful desires and greed are ingrained into our personality. They tarnish and corrupt our entire being. It became our habit to live by this nature. It is very comfortable to do so. Sometimes we try to enjoy the pleasures of sin. We are afraid of losing our sinful nature, thinking we will lose the joy of life. We think that life without sin will be boring and stale and stodgy. Is it true? Let’s find out. Today’s passage teaches us that we have to put that inner enemy to death. Furthermore, we need to clothe ourselves with God’s nature. In order to do so we need to keep seeking Christ. When we keep seeking Christ we can grow strong and mature. We can fight against our sinful nature and grow as spiritual people who can please God.

Colossians chapters 1 and 2 are primarily doctrinal. Chapter 3 and 4 are primarily applications based on the doctrine. Apostle Paul’s letters always come with doctrine and application. We need both of them. If doctrine is compared to the frame of a house, application is like the furnishings. Without a strong frame, furnishings have no place. Without furnishings, the frame itself is weird. We need both of them. Then it can be a proper house that people can live in. In the same way, without doctrine, our Christian life has no foundation. Without application, doctrine is like an empty echo. In chapters 3 and 4 Paul applies Christian doctrine to our practical lives. The theme is: “A new person and a new life.” In 3:1-4 Paul gives a general description of our new life in Christ. In 3:5-11 Paul tells us to put to death the earthly nature and why we have to do so. In 3:12-17 Paul exhorts us to clothe ourselves with God’s nature. In 3:18-4:1 Paul gives us principles to govern our marriages, families, and social lives. In 4:2-18 Paul shares personal prayer

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topics and greetings. In today's passage Paul tells us how to live our new lives, personally and in community.

I. New life in Christ (1-4)

Verses 1-4 give us clear reasons why we should live our new life in Christ. Let's read 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."** The phrase, **"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ..."** confirms the fact that we died together with Christ and were raised together with Christ. When we believe Christ as our Savior and Lord, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. The important word is "with." It is repeated seven times (2:12[2]; 2:13,20; 3:1-4). Jesus died for our sins on the cross and was raised from the dead. That event happened in time and space 2,000 years ago. Many people wonder how this could have any effect on their lives today. The Bible teaches us that Christ died once for all. Christ's death was not ordinary, but was the death of the Son of God, who was sinless and a perfect sacrifice. His atonement for our sins was perfect. Then he conquered death through his resurrection. He is living ever and always--yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8). Since Christ is eternal, the effect of his atoning sacrifice is also eternal. When we believe that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. So Christ's cross becomes my cross, and Christ's resurrection becomes my resurrection. So, "Since you have been raised with Christ," means that we have a new life. Our sins are forgiven. Our old self is gone, and the new has come. Now we have become a new creation in Christ Jesus. We don't need to try to be a new creation by doing something. We have already become a new creation. Now we can live a wonderful new life as a citizen of God's kingdom.

As a new person, what should we do? Verse 1b says, "...set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." As mentioned in the introduction, "set your hearts on things above," means "keep seeking Christ." It is like running a marathon. We have to keep running, fixing our eyes on Jesus. If we stop running we cannot reach the goal. Christ is our goal. Christ is not dead; he is living. He is at the right hand of God and is the Sovereign Ruler. Romans 8:34b says, "Christ Jesus who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Christ is interceding for us to plead the forgiveness of our sins, the strengthening of our faith to fight the good fight, and for victory over our enemies. This was Paul's secret power source. So he confessed, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Php 4:13). The Lord strengthens us in many ways: through prayer, through the words of God, through fellowship with God's people, through spiritual mentors, through good

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Christian literature and movies. We are not alone in our race of faith. Many people feel that they are alone. Even in a big ministry, people feel loneliness in a crowd. Loneliness leads to depression. But Christ is with us and is interceding for us, cheering for us, and providing everything we need to live a victorious life. Thank you, Jesus!

Look at verse 2. "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Here "earthly things" are contrasted with "things above," or "heavenly things." The phrase "set your minds" means "keep thinking" about things above. Here we learn the importance of thinking. Those who think on earthly things are under the power of death. Those who think on things above can enjoy life and peace (Ro 8:6). Jesus diagnosed that in the time of Noah and Lot people were only thinking about eating and drinking, marrying, buying and selling, planting and building. These things in themselves are not bad. But people were thinking only about these things and pursued them as their life goal. They sought money, power, and pleasure as the chief end of their pursuits. They gave their whole lives to obtain these things, and then they died. They did not consider the sanctity of life or have any regard for spiritual things. As human beings, we need to consider what is most valuable in our lives. Paul said in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things." This means we must think about truth, nobility, righteousness, purity, beauty, greatness, and excellence. Most of all we have to think about God and what he has done. When we think only about earthly things we remain earthbound. Earthbound people and things will all perish. But when we think about spiritual things, we can grow as spiritual people. God prepares his kingdom for such people.

Setting our hearts and minds on things above does not mean that we ignore our basic human obligations. But it means that we are not bound by earthly life. We pursue a higher goal, a higher quality of life as new creations in Christ Jesus. God created human beings to seek things above. This makes us different from the animals. Foolish people try to gain both the world and God. Yet they are rejected by both. C.S. Lewis said, "If you seek heaven, you will gain earth as a bonus. But if you seek the earth, you will lose both." Jesus said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Verses 3-4 explain why we should keep seeking Christ. They say, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." "We died" means that our old self died. It was crucified together with Christ. In the early Korean church, there was a famous pastor named Ik-du Kim. In his past life he had been a

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notorious gangster. After believing in Jesus, the first thing he did was to send out a letter that he was dead. People rejoiced upon hearing this notice because he was such a notorious gangster. One day he appeared in the marketplace, holding a Bible in his hands. People were surprised. They wondered if he had really changed. So, one man poured a bucket of water on his head to test him. Then Pastor Kim looked back at him and said, "You should be happy that old Ik-du Kim is dead. Otherwise, you would be broken to pieces." We died to our old life with all of its wickedness and bad habits. Now our lives are hidden with Christ in God. This refers to eternal life as a new creation. This new life began like a seed that grows. For a time we have conflict. Our natural bodies are susceptible to the power of sin and weaknesses of the flesh. But Christ's life is in us and this life is growing. What will the outcome be? When Christ comes again our natural body will be changed into a glorious spiritual body. We will be free from the sinful nature and the limitations of the natural body. We will enjoy eternal life fully. When Christ appears, we will also appear with him in glory.

II. Put to death the earthly nature (5-11)

While we are living in this world, we have to struggle against our sinful nature. Verse 5 says, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry." This struggle is a matter of life and death. We cannot have a tolerant attitude toward sin, or compromise with sin; we must put to death whatever belongs to the earthly nature. In C. S. Lewis' work, "The Great Divorce," which refers to the total separation between heaven and hell, he illustrates this truth well. A disfigured man comes before a holy angel of God with a red lizard on his shoulder. This lizard represents his lustful desires which have held him in bondage and degraded his existence. The angel offers to deal with the lizard. But the lizard whispers into the man's ears, trying to convince him that life without him would not be worth living. After a painful struggle, the man finally consents to the angel, who immediately takes the lizard from his shoulder and destroys it with one swift blow from his sword. Then the man suddenly changes his appearance. All of his ugliness and distortion disappears and he becomes handsome and strong. At the same time, out of the remains of the lizard rises a great white stallion, which the man mounts, and both leap upward and onward, soaring to great new heights. Though it may be painful, we need to put to death the elements of our sinful nature. When we do so, we can experience glorious new life.

The earthly things mentioned in verse 5 are related to sex and greed. Greed is described as idolatry. Some capitalists think greed is good as a motivating factor to

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develop economic strength. But because of the greed of a few, many Americans are in financial ruins. Why should we put to death our earthly nature? Verse 6 says, "Because of these the wrath of God is coming." People generally take the wrath of God lightly. But when we see the flood of Noah's day, and the fire and brimstone rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, we should realize no one can endure God's wrath. God is just. He punishes sin and injustice and no one can escape his judgment. Many people think that they have enough time to prepare for God's judgment, and they can do so later. But God's judgment is ongoing and coming much sooner than we realize. So we must put our earthly nature to death now, not later. Colossian believers used to walk in those ways. But after receiving a new life in Christ, they had to rid themselves of all such things, including anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from their lips (8). 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. If it is done to God, it is blasphemy. It is the cause of harmful divisions. While we enjoy the privilege of free speech, many think lightly of using filthy language. But it is another manifestation of the sinful nature which must be put to death. Paul notes in particular that we must not lie to each other (9). The general phenomenon of unbelieving societies is that people lie to each other. Lies come from the father of lies, Satan. If we lie and take advantage of each other, our fellowship cannot stand. It can become the playground of Satan. According to Revelation 21:8, all liars will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. So the Bible tells us to speak truthfully in love (Eph 4:15). This is the character of God's children. When we do so, we can experience the kingdom of God in our fellowship. We can grow to maturity in Christ, both as individuals, and as a body. Verse 10 says, "...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." Being renewed is an ongoing process. We are all in the process of being made new in the image of God. There is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (11). Christ removes all kinds of barriers. In Christ we are all brothers and sisters. In Christ we are a new community in his likeness, regardless of human distinctions.

III. Clothe yourselves with God's nature (12-17)

In part 2 we learned the negative aspect of seeking Christ by putting to death the sinful nature, which wages war against our soul (1 Pe 2:11b). In this part we will think about the positive aspect of seeking Christ by putting on God's nature, in

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which we are being renewed in the image of God. Look at verse 12. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." We are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved; this is our new identity. In the past we were not God's people. We were ugly, terrible and wretched sinners. We were not dearly loved; we were obnoxious enemies of God. But God, in his great mercy, forgave all our sins and made us his precious, holy children, who are dearly loved. Now that we are God's children, we must live accordingly. Our inner character should reflect God's character. 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 the most important virtue. It is to acknowledge God as God and to respect others more than oneself. Once Augustine's disciples asked him what was the most important of all Christian virtues. He said, "First is humility; second is humility; third is humility." Gentleness is not subservience. It is power expressed in mildness. God's gentleness was expressed when he became a baby in a manger whom everyone can access. Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem to assume kingship. Patience is waiting quietly without anger. Paul said that patience was the first element of love (1 Cor 13:4). Patience never gives up hope. We must grow in these virtues as God's children.

While verse 12 has to do with Christian character, verses 13-14 have to do with relationships in the Christian community. Verse 13 says, "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." What does it mean to bear with each other? Everyone has a strong point, and at the same time one or more weak points. We should encourage others in their strong point and tolerate their weak points. However, people have a tendency to emphasize others' weak points and ignore their strong points. After pinpointing others' weakness, we want to correct them. But we should realize that changing someone's character is God's work. Our job is to bear with others and to forgive others. An unforgiving heart makes people ugly and sick. But forgiveness brings peace, harmony and beauty. Forgiving others is not easy. So Paul said, "...as the Lord forgave you." When we remember Jesus who forgave all our sins from the cross, we can find the strength and grace to forgive others.

Verse 14 says, "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." All the Christian virtues are summarized in one word: Love. Although we have great faith, without love we are nothing. God is love. God's children must be growing in the love of God until they reach maturity. Childish Christians envy and dishonor others, boast about themselves and seek their own glory, get angry easily, keep records of wrongs in their hearts and talk badly about others. But mature Christians put childish ways behind them. They always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere (1 Cor 13:4-8). When

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we put on God's love, it binds us all together in perfect unity. In every fellowship there are conflicts between coworkers. How can we solve these conflicts? Put on love. Jesus' last and greatest command to his disciples was, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

Verses 15-16 describe Christian community. The first characteristic is that the peace of Christ rules each person's heart, because as members of one body we were called to peace. We should not allow worldly worries, but the peace of Christ to rule our hearts when we gather. The peace of Christ is different from the peace that the world gives (Jn 14:27). This peace comes from reconciliation with God. It is eternal peace that no one takes away. Another characteristic of Christian community is that the message of Christ dwells among us richly. When it does, all fears, worries and anxieties vanish. We can be thankful and we can teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. We can sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God.

Verse 17 is the conclusion. It says, "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." Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the head of the church. Whenever we gather, we must do everything in him and through him and for him. When Christ is honored, God is pleased and he will bless our community abundantly. The famous musician Johannes Bach did not sign his name to his compositions. Instead, he wrote the letters "INDNJC," which stand for the Latin "In Nominee Domini Nostri Jesus Christi," which means in English "In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the right attitude of a person in Christ.

When we look at verses 15-17 we find the words "be thankful," "gratitude," and "giving thanks to God." Here we learn another important characteristic of Christian gathering. It is to be thankful. Paul frequently mentioned being thankful to God. Though we hear this often, our thankfulness falls short of what it should be. God really does not like grumbling, complaining and ungratefulness. Those who complained in the wilderness were bitten by snakes, or swallowed by the earth, and perished. The characteristic of a mature Christian is that he or she is always thankful.

Thus far, we have learned what kind of life a new person in Christ should live. The most important thing in our new life is to keep seeking Christ. Christ is our life goal. We must keep seeking Christ, thinking about him. Christ is in us. Christ is with us. Christ is interceding for us. So we should let Christ rule our hearts and our community. Then we can grow in the image of Christ, and our community can be like the kingdom of God and can be used as God's instrument of righteousness.