

Colossians 3:1-11 — Why Does My Thought Life Matter?

November 19, 2017

Good morning. Great to have you today. This is a great morning. On both of our campuses, we are studying our way through the book of Colossians. This morning begins an exciting and intensely practical section of the book.

Before we jump into our study, I need to do a little overview. You need to understand most of Paul's New Testament letters are written in two pieces. The first half gives us the truth about Jesus, the second half gives us practical instructions on how to live for Jesus. For instance, in the book of Ephesians, chapters 1-3 are the truth about Jesus, chapters 4-6 are how we live for Jesus. The book of Romans is the same way. Romans 1-8 are the truth about Jesus. Romans 9-16 teach how the truth of Jesus works out in everyday life. The same is true for the book of Colossians. Chapters 1 and 2 are about what God has done for us through Jesus. Chapters 3 and 4 are about how we live for Jesus in everyday life.

This morning, we begin Colossians 3, which is about how to live for Jesus in everyday life. For the next month and a half, Colossians will be extremely practical. Paul will show us how Jesus changes our marriages. We will learn how Jesus changes our parenting. We will see how Jesus changes the way we work. We will see how Jesus changes the way we respond to people that hurt us.

While I always encourage you to invite friends and neighbors to church where they can hear about Jesus, the next few weeks are an especially good time to do this since they are about how Jesus changes everyday life.

This morning, Paul will look at how Jesus must change our thought lives. Please listen closely. What we are talking about is essential to living for Christ. This is also one of the huge blind spots in the lives of most Christians as they think their thought lives don't matter. What we think will determine how we live.

All Christian living begins with a Christian-honoring thought life. Satan is waging a battle for your mind. He is waging a battle to fill your thoughts with ungodly things. If he can fill your thought life with ungodly things, an ungodly lifestyle will naturally follow. What we allow ourselves to think about matters.

We will develop our thoughts this morning under three headings. 1) Set my thoughts life on godly things, not sinful things. 2) Put off my old life and put on my new life. 3) Jesus is my identity. I don't need to find one.

Set my thought life on godly things, not sinful things.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Colossians 3:1–2 (ESV)

Paul began, "If you have been raised with Christ..." In other words, "If you are a Christian." If you are a Christian, you need to be seeking the things that are above, in other words heavenly things. This means the goals in our lives — what we are seeking out of life — need to change.

As Christians, when we trusted in Christ, we buried our old lives and old ways of thinking. We were raised to new lives with Christ and a completely new way of thinking. Baptism is a picture of what happened to us. When you go under the water in baptism, that represents being buried with Christ. Your old life died, and we bury it. Then you come out of the water, and that shows we have risen with Christ. Just as Christ's resurrection power raised him to new life, the same

resurrection power raises you to a completely new life. This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3 that he must be born again. This is why Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that if you are in Christ you are a new creation. You are not a repaired old person but a completely new person.

Set godly goals that reflect who I am in Christ.

Seeking refers to the goals we set in life. What are your goals? Is your goal popularity? It will show up in what you wear, how you spend your money and how much time you spend on social media. Is your goal money? For many people, that is their goal. They will do anything to make money. They are not ethically honest. Is your goal to be the most beautiful person out there? We all have goals. Most of us do not write our goals down. Each of us have them, and they subtly drive us.

There is nothing wrong with a goal to make money. There is nothing wrong to have a good name with our friends. The problem is when our goal becomes our identity. Earthly things are not to be our ultimate goal in life. We set our minds on heavenly things. Living for Jesus and living to please Jesus is our ultimate goal.

If you are a Christian, God gives you a different set of goals in life. Your goal may still be popularity but you are now more concerned with putting a smile on God's face than the face of others. Your goal may still be to make money but you want to make money ethically with integrity so when you stand before Jesus he is pleased with your business.

Think thoughts that are in line with my eternal life, not my old earthly life.

This is very practical. Paul said we are to set our mind on things that are above, not on earthly things. As Christians, our thought life matters. We must think thoughts in line with who we are in Jesus, not who we were before Jesus. As Christians, it doesn't just matter how we live. It matters how we think. It matters what we put into our minds. We want to put godly things into our mind, not earthly garbage.

One of the reasons why this matters is because what we think about in our minds will become the goals we set in our lives. This is the way advertising works. Advertisers want you to see new clothes in their magazine and on the Internet. When you see their clothes, you will begin thinking about their clothes. If you are thinking about their clothes, your goal will eventually become buying their clothes. What we think in our mind will set the direction in our lives.

This is what makes the Internet so good and bad. The Internet can fill your mind with good things but it can also quickly fill your mind with bad things. As Christians, we must guard what we pour into our minds. What we think about will set the goals for our lives.

Consider this when it comes to music. What kind of music do you listen to? There are some great non-Christian musicians. That doesn't mean we should listen to their music. We need to be discerning. We need to be careful of the words we put into our mind through the music we enjoy. Some of you are disagreeing with what I just said. You want me to know that you just listen to the music but you don't listen to the words of the music you enjoy. When our minds

remember music, we remember the words of the music. If I started to sing the words to “Amazing Grace,” you could finish the lyrics and you would finish the lyric as you sung the melody. Music and words work together to cement the words of the music in our brain. The words of the music we listen to will determine what we are seeking in life. If you listen to music that talks about a low view of sexuality, violence or cuss words, what direction will your mind be thinking? What goals will you subtly set for your life?

Others of you claim you don’t necessarily listen to evil music but you listen to value neutral music. Is that possible? I don’t think there is such a thing as value neutral music. All words have meaning. It is simply a question of how positive the meaning of the words are. Second, if there was such a thing as value neutral music, listening to it might not be a good idea. What is better, listening to value positive music or value neutral music? Do you want to eat food with no nutrition or good nutrition? It seems wise to eat the most wholesome foods and listen to the most positive music.

Christian teenagers, I commend you to listen to positive Christian music. Not just any Christian music but music whose words are saturated with Scripture and truth. Listen to music that builds up your mind in Christ. I don’t care if it is rock, classical or rap music. The style doesn’t matter to me as much as the message it contains.

One of the reasons we sing worship songs on Sunday is we want you singing them through the week as you remember Sunday’s songs and sing them in your heart.

The same principle is true when it comes to movies, Netflix and television. We need to be discerning what we use as entertainment. The scenes of a movie become what we think about in our minds. They teach us how to respond in life. If we watch movies modeling violence, we learn to respond to those who hurt us with violence. Watching movies about revenge certain doesn't encourage us to treat those who hurt us with patience, love and gentleness. When Hollywood big-wigs began giving homosexual characters key roles in television programs, they did it so we learn to think homosexuality is normal. They know that when we are watching, they are teaching.

What we think about as Christians is very, very important. What we think in our minds will determine the direction for our lives. This is why when Paul wrote to the Philippians he said:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

Here is Paul's point: Set your mind on things that are above. Think the same kind of thoughts now we will have in our resurrection bodies later. Don't allow yourself to be captivated by the sinful thoughts of your old creation life. That is who you were. It isn't who you are.

Remember who I was, who I am and one day who I will be.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:3-4 (ESV)

Paul said to remember you died to your old way of life with Jesus. Remember what happened. You don't think about life like other people. You don't

have the same goals in life as other people. We are completely new because of Jesus. Our old lives are dead. Don't expect to fit in.

Right now, we don't look different. We don't feel different. Right now, we get sick like everybody else. We get old like everybody else. We face temptations, troubles and trials like everybody else. We don't look that impressive. That is OK. Paul told us that while our true identity has begun in our hearts, our full identity isn't yet visible.

The fullness of our new lives in Christ is currently hidden with Christ in God. Right now who we truly are is not visible.

When Christ appears, we will also appear with him in glory. That means when Christ returns, he will not come back with his glory hidden — like he was on earth — he will come back with his glory fully revealed. He will come back as the rider on the white horse in Revelation with eyes like fire that blaze with brilliance. He will pulsate power. The glory of Jesus' true identity will be fully revealed as God in the flesh. He will be so brilliant that he will illuminate the entire new creation. There is no sun because the new earth is illuminated by the son. Paul said when Jesus appears, we also will appear with him in glory. Our bodies right now are weak. They get sick and die. One day our bodies will rise from the grave like Jesus' body rose from the grave. Our bodies will be just like his body. We will glow with light, be filled with power, brilliance and strength. As Christ became like us, when he returns, we will become like him. That is our true identity. You and I will one day be like the resurrected glorified Jesus. Think of that moment when who we are is fully revealed.

Our true identity for all of eternity we will be the most blessed beings in the universe. We will be the most powerful and highest ranked beings in the entire universe. Nothing in all the universe will have more brilliance than Christians. We will be even more powerful and highly exalted than the angels. Nothing is higher in power, might and glory for all of eternity than Jesus, and we are in Jesus. The angels that now look down at us will one day look up to us. Look what Paul said:

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! 1 Corinthians 6:3 (ESV)

The word judge in Greek implies we will take part in the judgment of the fallen angels. The word judge doesn't just imply judgment but it implies ruling and governing. This implies we will rule and govern the elect angels that are not condemned to the Lake of Fire.

This needs to change the way we think about life. We need to think about who we are. We need to live like who we are. Stop living like what we were.

Paul said because of who we now are, there are things that must be put to death in our lives because they are completely antithetical to our new identities. He gave us three examples of what we must put to death.

Put off my old life and put on my new life.

Kill Sexual Sin

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5 (ESV)

When Paul talked about getting rid of these things from our lives, he was not implying we do this on our own strength. Rather it is the strength of God working in us that enables us to live out who we are and to take off our old ways.

Sexual Immorality — This is the Greek word *porneia*. This is the word where we get our English word pornography. *Porneia* is a junk drawer term for any sexual expression outside of the marriage. It is absolutely not to be part of the Christian life. Sex before marriage and outside of marriage is the kind of life we lived before Christ. It is not who we are in Christ. The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:20 said the new Gentile Christians were to avoid sexual immorality. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:18 to run from sexual immorality. Sexuality immorality (*porneia*) doesn't just mean avoiding the final act of sex, but it includes all the preliminary stuff leading up to the final act. I tell my boys it is anything you wouldn't do with your sister. God doesn't want you making out with your girlfriend before marriage. That is *porneia*.

How far is too far? When the pastor in the wedding says, "You may kiss the bride," God says that is to be the first time you should kiss your bride. Before that moment the woman at the altar was your sister, not your wife.

I had someone approach me after I talked about this subject and he asked where in the Bible it tells us young men and women should not kiss passionately before their wedding. I shared with him 1 Timothy 5:2 where Paul instructed young Timothy how he should conduct himself around young women.

[...older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. 1 Timothy 5:2 \(ESV\)](#)

Now I know what you are thinking — "Pastor Kurt is a complete prude. He isn't living in reality. Everybody sleeps together before they are married." Some of you think, you don't plan on sleeping together before the wedding night but you plan on plenty of other things before the wedding. You know how I know what

you are thinking? The culture around us tells us everybody does this before their wedding night. What they have you thinking has become the goal you are seeking for your dating life. You see, it is always a battle for the mind.

Some of you think I have a negative view of sex. Others of you think the Bible has a negative view of sex. The Bible has a high view of sex. God created sex. He understands it better than you do. The Bible has a high view of sex. God knows the only safe place for a fire is the fireplace. If you light a fire on your couch, you will burn down the house. In the same way, God knows the only safe place for sex is marriage. If you light sexual fires someplace other than marriage, there will be serious damage. It is almost impossible to avoid.

Impurity — In the Greek, this word means not clean. While *porneia* dealt with physical sexuality outside of marriage, impurity covers not just the physical but the imagination of the mind, sexual fantasies. Some people say, it doesn't matter what I am thinking about people. It doesn't matter if I am undressing them in my mind. It doesn't matter what I am fantasizing about because nobody else is involved. It doesn't matter if I look at people on the Internet, lust after them and dream about what I would like to do with them because nobody is involved. Paul said nobody else may be involved because it is just your fantasy, but treating people that way in your mind is unclean. It shouldn't be part of your life. Jesus said it this way.

But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:28 (ESV)

Here is what you need to remember. Sinful sexual behavior in our lives always begins as sinful sexual behavior in our minds. What we role play in our minds will eventually become what we real play in our lives.

I told you before, it is always a battle for the mind. What you allow yourself to think about will set the direction for your life.

Passion — This is the Greek word pathos. It is sometimes translated lust. While impurity is a forbidden fantasy, passion is what ignites that desire. It is looking at people with a lustful intent. This is looking at people like they are pieces of meat. It means you look at somebody as a body, not a person. It is constantly evaluating the opposite sex based on their sexuality. It is putting yourself in the position of an Olympic judge, giving people of the opposite sex a grade. You decide who is a perfect 10. Paul said this kind of thinking not to be part of a Christian's life. Put it to death. We look at people like people. We look at others as brothers and sisters in Christ, not as sex objects to satisfy our lust. I like the way Job put it.

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? Job 31:1 (ESV)

Notice the progression. We went from the physical act of extramarital sexuality, to the mental act of rehearsing premarital or extramarital sex, to where it all begins, which is fanning the flames of the lustful thoughts of our hearts. Instead of rebuking those thoughts, it is enjoying them. Paul said we put this kind of stuff to death. It is the earthly-only life. It is not the stuff of our new life in Jesus.

Evil Desire — This literally means wicked lust. The previous word dealt with normal sexual lusts. What happens is when people spend time enflaming their

normal sexual passions, it leads to an appetite for perverted sexual passions. This gives rise to all the perverted stuff on the Internet. When people allow themselves to begin this kind of lusting, they are no longer looking for a husband or wife but for a twisted sexual experience to satisfy their wicked lusts. This is where it leads. Paul said all this stuff must be put to death in a Christian's life. It is who you were; it is not who you are. You must no longer live that way.

Notice all of these things come from what you allow yourself to think. What you think about in the mind starts sets goals for your life, which sets your actions.

Remember, Paul said that as Christians, Jesus inside of us gives us the power to say no to this sin. We can choose to walk away from that lifestyle and put it to death. We have help from the Holy Spirit. We have help from the Word of God. We have help from prayer. We have help from the church and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Since we have Jesus, this is not a losing battle.

Covetousness — Covetousness means a constant desire to have something we don't have but other people possess. It is listed as one of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. If somebody has a nice car, it is not being content with your car but having a burning desire to possess your neighbor's better car. In this vice list in Colossians, I don't think Paul was talking about covetousness in general. Everything else in this list is talking about sexuality. I think Paul was talking about sexual covetousness. This means refusing to be content with the spouse you have and longing for someone else's spouse, who you think is better. Instead of seeking contentment with your husband or wife, you have a burning desire for someone else's husband or wife.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. You don't actively covet somebody else's spouse. That would be creepy. The problem is when you look at a picture on the Internet, you are coveting what is somebody else's spouse, or if that person is single, someday that will be somebody else's spouse. You are refusing to be content with our own spouse. Some of you are not married. If you are not married and want to be married, ask God to bring the right person into your life. Until that time comes, do not lustfully covet a woman that can't become your wife no matter where you find her. Sexual covetousness is longing for someone you don't have rather than thanking God for the spouse you do have. As Christians, we put that to death. That is the kind of person we were, not the new kind of person we are because of Jesus. It all starts in the mind. The thoughts of our mind set the goals for our lives.

Idolatry — Paul said sexual covetousness is rooted in idolatry. It is worshipping other people's bodies instead of our savior. It worshipping our sexuality instead of the God who created sexuality. Paul said we need to put all this to death.

God is not a sexual prude. He loves you. Biopsychologists are now saying what the Bible says about saving sex for marriage and not inflaming it before marriage or enflaming it outside of marriage is the best thing to do. They tell us the center in our brain triggered by sexual intimacy is the same part of our brain triggered by heroin. That means sexuality is as addictive as heroin. It bonds us to people like heroin. Just as heroin addicts find themselves with a habit that is almost impossible to break, the same chemical fix a couple receives during intimacy bonds them to one another in a way that is very difficult to break. That

kind of bonding works great in marriage. It doesn't work well in a hook-up and break-up lifestyle. It leaves deep wounds.

For those of you who are young, I know a life of absolutely no sex until your wedding night where you don't kiss someone until your wedding day feels really off in our culture. That is because the culture, not the Bible determined what you are thinking and the goal you are seeking for your dating life. God loves you. Live who you are, not who you were before Jesus changed you into the most blessed being in the universe. Trust God on this. You won't regret it.

To add a little extra incentive for sexual purity, Paul added this line.

On account of these the wrath of God is coming. Colossians 3:6 (ESV)

Remember, sexual impurity is the kind of thing on which God pours out his wrath.

Let me give you some examples from the biblical past to show you what God's wrath may look like in the future.

Noah — Genesis 6:12 tells us that one of the reasons God sent the flood to destroy the earth is that all flesh had corrupted their ways. The word corrupted in Hebrew means moral perverts. Sexual perversion was rampant on the earth at that the time of Noach, so God poured out his wrath with the flood.

Sodom and Gomorrah — In Genesis 19, God reigned down fire and sulfur on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because they were sexually perverted. In particular, they were given to homosexuality, but I am sure other kinds of sexual perversion permeated the city.

Israelite Men with Moabite Women — Numbers 25 tells us that Israelite men allowed themselves to be seduced by Moabite women so they began to indulge

in sexual immorality with Moabite women. As a result, God sent a plague on the nation and 24,000 died.

Sexual purity is something everyone constantly battles. The thing to know is enslavement to our sexual appetites is not who we are, it is who we were. We don't have to live the way we were. Come to God in prayer. Read God's Word. Grow close with Christian friends. There is victory over your struggles. Remember it all begins in the mind and what you allow yourself to think about. That will set the direction for your life.

Put to death sinful anger.

In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Colossians 3:7–8 (ESV)

Paul said, before Christ, not only was sexual perversion natural but so was anger. An angry life is something we must put away. Paul described it this way. — get rid of:

Anger — The word for anger means a deep smoldering bitterness. It is a general attitude of the heart. We would describe this as a person that is always angry.

They are just irritable. They are not known for joy. While they say other people make them angry, the truth is other people only give them a chance to vent their anger. Minor offenses result in major blow ups because anger and bitterness are

their disposition toward life. Do you know people like this? Do you know

Christians like this? As Christians, we need to change the way we think. We need to see ourselves for who we are, the most blessed beings in the universe.

Grumbling angry people have a disposition that doesn't display our new identity in Christ.

Wrath — Wrath is anger that boils over. Wrath is recognized by sudden outbursts of anger. It is flareups. Explosions. It is hastily spoken words. Biting and nasty responses. Do you know people like this? If there is a pinprick, they respond with a blowup. Paul said that Christians put to death that kind of lifestyle. That is not who you are in Jesus. It is who you were before Jesus. Angry wrathful people are not what we will be like in eternity when we appear with Jesus in glory. It is not what we should be like now.

Malice — This is planning evil and rejoicing when misery happens to someone. It is assuming the worst about people not the best about them. For example this is seeing somebody you don't like forget his wallet as he walks out of a restaurant. Rather than telling him, you let him leave it behind. The next day, when you see him at work in a panic, you are laughing inside saying, "It serves him right!"

You see, it always begins in the mind. What we think in our mind will set the direction for our lives. If you think the worst about people, you will start acting maliciously toward people. Paul said that is not the way the Christian life works.

Slander — Slander is hurtful speech about someone that shames her character. It is talking about people behind their backs. It is saying harmful things about people to others. Slander is what we see in modern politics. Slander can be a lie, which is a false story created to destroy someone's name or reputation.

Sometimes slander is true. Sharing a true story about someone that is unhelpful or unnecessary often qualifies as slander. As Christians, we are guilty of this kind of slander all the time. We call it a prayer request. We hear something of poor judgment said or done by a fellow Christian, we post it to all our Christians

friends on Facebook asking other to pray for that person. In reality, we should have protected her reputation rather than ruined her reputation. Slander will not be part of our lives in heaven so it shouldn't be part of our lives on earth.

Obscene talk — Paul said Christians are not to be known for our cuss words.

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4 (ESV)

We are to be known for our words, building others up not tearing them down. As Christians, our speech should not contain cussing. Trust me, you won't be cussing in your resurrection body in heaven, so we shouldn't be cussing in our current bodies on earth.

Stop lying.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Colossians 3:9–10 (ESV)

Paul moved from talking about sex and anger to talking about how we speak to one another. Don't lie to one another. John 8:44 says the devil is a liar. Lying is his native language. If the devil speaks lies, we shouldn't speak lies. Lying is who we were. It is not who we are. We are known for telling the truth. Lying was the old life we got rid of. Truth is the new life we live because we are Christians.

Conclusion

As I was thinking about how to wrap up this message, I ran across the illustration of Lazarus. Remember when Lazarus died? He was wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a grave for three days. His rotten body began to stink of decomposing flesh. Rotting human flesh is one of the nastiest odors. Those

grave clothes reeked of human decomposition. Jesus came to the grave, said Lazarus' name and transformed his dead life into a living one. He raised him from the dead. Lazarus came out of the grave a completely new person. He came out still wrapped in grave clothes, strips of cloth that permeated with the smell of human decomposition.

Now that he was alive, he was wearing the wrong clothes. He needed to get off the disgusting clothes of the dead and put on the clothes of the living. He was no longer a dead man!

In the same way, before Christ, we were dead men and women. The clothes of our human lives reflected the death of our soul, but Jesus said our name. He called to us when we were dead, and he made us alive.

He said we are no longer dead men and women but living men and women. We need to take off the filthy rags of our old lives and live like who we are —the most blessed beings in the universe, the adopted sons and daughters of God.

How do we live our new lives? It all begins with our thought lives. Think the thoughts in line with who we are, and we will begin living like what we have become.



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