

Flesh and Spirit-3: Is Your Head in the Clouds?

1. My Frustration with the Flesh

- a. Are you ever frustrated by spiritual weakness? You know what I mean.
 - i. When you have a neighbor who you know would be blessed by a relationship with Christ but you cannot get the nerve up to share with them?
 - ii. Or when a common temptation gets the best of you, even when you thought you had it beat...and it comes out of left field and all of your resolutions, your convictions seem to fold and you give into it seemingly without a fight?
 - iii. Happens to me a lot more than I would like to admit! Probably does to you too.
- b. This week, I was trying to pray and every few minutes distracting thoughts came into my mind, thoughts about something I had to repair, thoughts about something I had to buy, thoughts about things that I had to do. I would try to shake off those distractions and set my mind on the Lord, but in a few minutes, I would be distracted again.
 - i. Have you ever had that happen to you?
 - ii. **It seems that the cares and concerns of daily life are always trying to crowd out the Life in the Spirit that we know we need.**
 - iii. **Does that frustrate you?** (I hope so) It frustrates me!
- c. Over the past two weeks we have looked at the “problem of the flesh” and last week we learned that one of the solutions to dealing with the flesh was to walk in the Spirit and to lose our “self” centeredness and self-consciousness and even our self-awareness.
 - i. Because this problem of the flesh is so common, Paul wrote letters to 5 churches that are in the NT. addressing the problem of the flesh and its war against the spirit.
 - ii. I think this story from Readers Digest might clue us in to why:
 - iii. Donald Ballar, Reader’s Digest, *Story of an instructor of student truck drivers. The instructor gave this scenario to his class. “You are in an 18-wheeler with a heavy load, barreling down a mountainous two-lane highway. Ed, your co-driver, is asleep. There are six trucks behind you, and as you come over the top of a hill, one of the trucks behind you pulls out into the left lane to pass. As he comes along side you, you see several trucks coming from the opposite direction moving towards you. One of the trucks coming at you is in your lane because it is passing an on coming truck. There are five trucks behind and one beside you. There are several trucks in front of you and the two out front have both lanes blocked. The question is, ‘What will you do?’ ‘The answer is simple’ a student called out. ‘I would wake up Ed.’ ‘Why would you do that?’ asked the instructor. The student replied with, ‘Because, Ed ain’t never seen a truck wreck like this before!’”*
- d. Christians should not wait for a disastrous wreck with the flesh before they learn to deal with it.
 - i. All too many of us refuse to admit we have a struggle with the flesh.
 1. It is evident when we are afraid to come to the kneeling rails to repent or to commit ourselves to God. *“I don’t want anyone to think or know I’m struggling”*
 2. Gosh...I got a secret for you: EVERYONE in this room is thinking the EXACT same thing? *“I don’t want anyone to think or know I’m struggling”*
 - ii. God knows you are struggling with the flesh. I know it. You know it. And God has great advice in His word on how to deal with “The Flesh.”
- e. Our best weapon, we learned last week, against our old nature is the Holy Spirit. This week we will learn a *practical step* to living in the Power of the Spirit.
 - i. I like to call it...**Getting Your head in the clouds.**

Colossians 3:1—4 *Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

2. **VI:** *“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”*
- a. Key phrase: “if you have been raised up with Christ” = He’s addressing believers.
 - b. This “if” is not a statement of doubt, it is a theological fact that Paul is stating.
 - i. He says that if you are a believer in Christ (are you a believer?), if you are a Christian (are you a Christian?) then you have been raised up with Christ.
 - ii. Paul states this as a fact in Ephesians 2:4-6 *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*
 1. Do you see this FACT? It is something that God wants us to dwell upon.
 2. **You have been raised up with Christ!**
 3. Your position before God in heaven is “in Christ Jesus.”
 - a. You don’t have to exert effort to achieve it. It is already done.
 - b. As far as God is concerned, you are already there.
 - c. You are “seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”
 - d. I DARE you to mediated upon what that means this week.
 - c. The word “if” could really be translated “Since.” So Paul says, SINCE you have been raised up with Christ, *“Keep seeking the things above.”*
 - i. “Keep seeking” (zeteo) means *to seek after and strive for earnestly*, to devote serious effort to aim at, to try to obtain some state or condition (cf Rev9:6)
 1. It is in the present tense demanding the continuous action and lifestyle of seeking the things above, NOT JUST ON SUNDAY.
 2. It is written in the active voice which means that this seeking is a choice of our will & God will not force us to take this action.
 - ii. To have a preoccupation with the eternal realities that are ours in Christ is to be the NORMAL pattern of the believer’s life .
 - iii. To seek the things above involves:
 1. It involves giving your attention to Jesus,
 2. It involves giving Jesus first place in everything and
 3. It involves giving Jesus priority in all we do and the decisions we make.
 4. It involves desiring Jesus above anything on earth
 5. It involves continually making a deliberate choice to follow Him, to obey Him, to think about Him, to meditate on His life giving Word..
 6. It also means we don’t give up when prayer doesn’t come easy.
 7. It means that we make hard choices that lead us to deny our own wills.
 - d. Paul doesn’t give us a “list” to keep, a list of do’s and don’ts.
 - i. He tells us INSTEAD to seek heavenly things “*...where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*”
 - ii. Where is Christ? Seated at the right hand of God. Look at what John saw when he got a peek into the heavenly things:.
 1. Rev 4:1-4 *“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting (our verse just said where Christ is seated...) on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.”*

2. *Rev 1:12-18 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. **When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.***

iii. If that doesn't light your fire, your wood is wet!

iv. Seek heavenly things where Christ is SEATED at the right hand of God!

3. **v2** *Set your mind on the things above (in heaven), not on the things that are on earth..*

a. "set your mind" = "keep thinking about." (Robertson's Word Pictures)

i. The phrase "set your mind" describes the affections (heart), the will and the mind.

ii. It refers to the basic orientation of the mind and it refers to our inner disposition.

iii. The best safeguard against seeking things below is not to set our mind upon them

iv. Setting one's minds on things above involves an act of one's will (active voice) and is something we must do continually and habitually. (positive statement)

v. That's a lot harder to do than we think. Try NOT to think about things on earth. Just the act of trying NOT to do something makes it harder. That is why the first ½ of the verse says "set your mind on the things above" first.

1. Joni Eraeckson Tada (paralyzed young woman in a diving accident) writes: "*Why are all the verbs in the present tense? Because God wants to get your heart beating with a present-tense excitement, a right-around-the-corner anticipation of Heaven. Isn't that the way strangers on foreign soil are supposed to feel about their homeland?*"

2. Set your minds on the things above...

3. Lightfoot says: "*You must not only seek heaven, you must think heaven*"

4. The believer's whole disposition should orient itself toward heaven, where Christ is, just like a compass needle always points toward north.

vi. Do you remember Stephen, the first martyr? **In (Acts 7:55, 56) Stephen's mental focus was evident in his Spirit-filled attitude as He was about to be stoned to death. He chose not to look at his executioners but to look to Jesus and let all who were present know that he saw Christ standing at the right hand of God. Stephen did not choose to focus on his difficult situation but fixed his heart on the Lord, and gave us an incredible example of heavenly thinking.**

b. Many of us don't try very hard to guard our thoughts.

i. The bible says that "As a man *thinks within himself, so he is*" (Pr 23:7)

ii. For lots of us, the door of our heart stands open, with nothing to control the entry of the many thoughts that wander in.

1. *Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on **these things***". Phil4:7-8).

2. *2 Cor 4:18*"while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

iii. It matters what we think about and we are responsible the thoughts we entertain.

1. I have preached a number of messages that focused upon our thought life and the importance of guarding it. It can never be taken too lightly or preached too often. The subject of our thoughts and our minds appears all too often in the New Testament to take lightly.
2. As for me...I have let my mind wander far too often.
 - a. Until we recently got rid of our TV Dish, television filled my idle time and ate away my time. My mind was semi-captive to the television and all it spewed forth. It was stealing my thought life. How about you?
 - b. The Amish ask the question about television: would you drink from a water pipe that came to your home that was 90% pure and 10% sewage? Of course not. There is no way you could sort it out is there?
 - c. What fills your time and mind each day?
3. **If we are really serious about walking in the Spirit and not just about putting on a good show on Sunday morning, then each of us needs to make hard choices about what our minds “are set upon.”**
- iv. The Christian has to keep his feet upon the earth, but his head in the heavens.
 1. We will get our feet dirty, but let our minds be clear as they are focused upon Christ.
 2. The submarine is made to travel under the water. Yet, every submarine is equipped with a periscope by which it seeks those things that are above. It travels in the water, but the well-being of those in it depends on a knowledge of what is above. We live in the world, but we must set our minds (affections) on things above, for we are citizens of a heavenly country.
- v. An article in a San Francisco newspaper reported that a young man who once found a \$5 bill on the street resolved that from that time on he would never lift his eyes while walking. The paper went on to say that over the years he accumulated, among other things, 29,516 buttons, 54,172 pins, 12 cents a bent back, and a miserly disposition. But he also lost something—the glory of sunlight, the radiance of the stars, the smiles of friends, and the freshness of blue skies.
 1. I’m afraid that some of us are like that man.
 2. While we may not walk around staring at the sidewalk, we are so **engrossed with the things of this life** that we give little attention to spiritual and eternal things, but perhaps one day a week.
 3. *Quotation : “When God’s children, who are “seated with Christ in the heavenlies,” give their affection and attention to a world that is passing away, they lose the upward look. Their perspective becomes distorted, and they fail to bask in heaven’s sunlight. Taken up with the baubles of this world, they become defeated, delinquent Christians. Buttons, pins, and pennies, but no treasures laid up in heaven.”*
 4. Have you lost the UPWARD LOOK?
 5. Perhaps you can get that orientation back: *“Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things”* (Phil. 4:7-8).
- c. **How do we fix our attention on heavenly things?**
 - i. Recognize that we are distracted on earth:
 1. *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also;* (Mt 6:20-21)
 2. Our hearts follow our treasures. Most of us are storing our treasures on earth...

- a. We buy a new car, we are excited about a new home, a new job...these aren't bad things...but watch how PREOCCUPIED you become with them when they are new.
 - b. That's the problem with treasures. They hold our heart.
 - ii. We need to store up treasures in heaven. By how we serve, how we spend our time and our money. **When we spend it on things that are for only this life, we are ensuring that our hearts will be stuck like glue to those things instead of to God.**
- 4. V3-4 "*For you **have died** and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*"
 - a. Notice that the tense of v3 is PAST TENSE...meaning it has already happened.
- 5. In these 2 verses, we're given five reasons to look up.
 - a. **We've died** (3a). This looks back to the cross where we positionally died in Christ.
 - i. As a result, we have no obligation to live like we used to live.
 - ii. Galatians 2:20: "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*"
 - iii. As missionary James Calvert approached the Fiji Islands, the captain of the ship tried to discourage him from setting ashore on a cannibal island. "You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages," he said. Calvert only replied, "We died before we came here."
 - iv. **This is what it means to reckon yourself dead...you have died, the claims you had on life died, the claims your flesh have on you are gone. You have a new master... Jesus.**
 - v. We don't just receive a cosmetic makeover or simply add a Christian veneer that only makes our life look good on the outside.
 - vi. Our old nature is not renewed or even reformed; instead, **it is put to death.**
 - vii. In the process of trying to get a mouse out of our house... I killed it with a mouse trap. Now what do you suppose I did with that little dead mouse?
 - 1. * Did I put it on top of the TV in the Living Room?
 - 2. * Did I put it in a Tupperware box and put it in refrigerator?
 - 3. * Did I put a string on its tail and hang it from my car's rear view mirror?
 - 4. Nooo... I threw it in the trash and I never gave it a 2nd thought. I hadn't wanted it my house to begin with and now that it was dead, I DEFINITELY didn't want it around.
 - 5. QUESTION: When I put something to death that I didn't want around to begin with, how long do I keep it around the house?
 - 6. ANSWER: I don't. I get rid of it. I throw it in the trash. I throw out in the field. I remove it from my life. Because I didn't want it to begin with. That's why I killed it!
 - viii. This is God's truth for you. You have died with Christ. Will you let that sink in? You have given up all claims to yourself! **The deed on your life has changed hands.**
 - ix. **Why are you hanging onto that old corpse?**
 - b. **Our life is hidden with Christ** (3b).
 - i. The other ½ of verse 3 says "your life is hidden with Christ in God."
 - ii. To have our lives hidden with the One who is seated at the right hand of God gives us both security and satisfaction.
 - iii. I spoke last week of our position, that we are "in Christ."
 - 1. In a very real way, we are hidden in Him, not unlike that dollar bill inserted into that book.

2. The image here is **treasure** that is stored away in a secure place.
 3. YOU are that treasure!
 - iv. Like a seed buried in the earth, our real lives are hidden from the world, only to be revealed when Christ returns.
 - c. **Christ is our life** (4a).
 - i. In a very real sense for the believer, Christ is what life is all about.
 - ii. Without Him we would be dead in our sins.
 - iii. In John 14:6, Jesus said about himself: "I am the way, the truth, **and the life...**"
 - iv. By realizing that Christ is our life, we can have a new attitude about anything that happens to us.
 - v. He is supposed to be the focal point of our life. Is He the focal point of yours?
 - d. **Christ will come again** (4b).
 - i. Since Jesus is coming again, it only makes sense that we should be looking up on a continuous basis.
 - ii. The fact of His return is certain but the time is indefinite.
 - iii. Since we don't know the when, we must keep watching.
 - iv. Rev 22: 12-13 "*Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*
 - e. **We will appear with Him in Glory** (4c).
 - i. The verb, "appear" means "to make visible what is invisible."
 - ii. When Christ returns, the real **position** of the believer, which has been hidden to the world, will be made known. God says we are seated with Christ=Our hidden Position!
 - iii. When Jesus is revealed in His glory, we shall be totally transformed according to 1 John 3:2: "...*But we know that when he appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*"
6. Where are you looking this morning? What does your mind focus on? What gets the attention of your heart?
- a. Are you making a conscious, deliberate, and daily decision to look up and set your mind and heart on heavenly things?
 - b. Your outlook determines your outcome.
 - c. Keeping your minds and hearts in the right place will often determine where we end up.
7. Maybe you are struggling with your flesh and wondering how to get victory over that self-centered, nature? You begin by putting your attention on Christ. You begin with the surrender to the Spirit of God and allowing Him to control of your heart. You win by surrendering. By looking UP!

A pilot was flying over the Arabian Desert and landed at an oasis to refuel his plane. After taking to the air again, he was soon over a mountainous area when he heard a scratching noise behind him. It sounded as if some animal had gotten into the fuselage of the plane. He became quite alarmed, for he knew if an animal gnawed away at the electrical wiring it could cause a serious malfunction. But there was no place to land in that rugged territory. Then the pilot had an idea. He accelerated the plane and nosed it upward. Higher and higher into the sky he took it until the gnawing and scratching ceased. Later, when he landed at an airport, he found a huge desert rat that had crawled in unnoticed when he had refueled at the oasis. But the unwanted stowaway was dead! Accustomed as it was to the desert, it could not live when the plane climbed to the higher altitude. So it is in our spiritual life. As we "draw near to God" (Jas. 4:8), we put to death our mean, selfish, and sinful ways (Col. 3:5). The old patterns of living cannot survive. "Seek those things which are above" (Col. 3:1). The closer you draw in your relationship to the Lord, the more you will leave the world behind!¹

¹ Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. found on Precept Austin Website