

Keep Your Mind on Heavenly Things

Living above in Christ while still walking and working on earth is the goal of every Christian. But how do we get there?

A wonderful story has been handed down to us from the East. It goes like this: There was a king's son who, being expelled in infancy from his native city, was brought up by a forester. He learned the ways of the woods as well as the trade of a woodsman.

One day an official of his father's court discovered the young man and revealed to him his true identity. Suddenly he realized that he was nothing like the person he was brought up to be. Indeed, he was a prince.

So it is with us. When we come to Christ, we are rescued "from the domain of darkness, and transferred ... to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13, NASB). We become royalty. And just like the prince, who had to take up residence in the palace and learn to think like a prince to claim his inheritance, we must adopt the lifestyle and mind-set appropriate to our new identity.

SEATED IN HEAVENLY PLACES

We begin by recognizing that our home is no longer on this planet. "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). Christians now live in heaven and daily should be commuting to work on Earth.

Earth is just our workplace now. That is the reason the Word says to "set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on Earth" (Col. 3:2). We are not to settle down on Earth, thinking of heaven as our future abode. When we were

born again into Christ, God “raised us up [resurrected our spirits] with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6).

We would chuckle at the thought of astronauts vying for the best rock pile on which to build a temporary moon house. We can see that it would be ridiculous for them to construct a dwelling place, knowing they would be on the moon for only a short time.

But we aren’t always able to see as clearly the foolishness of our own long-term plans here on Earth. Having been raised on this planet and having been made of clay, we are strangely possessive about dirt.

Since none of these passions, attachments or desires is characteristic of our new family and of who we now are in Christ, we need to change our minds. But when I say, “change our minds,” I do not mean in the way we think of a paradigm shift. I mean that we must allow only the mind of Christ (which we have been given) to operate (see 1 Cor. 2:16).

How is this accomplished?

KNOWING THE TRUTH

First, we must ask the Holy Spirit to give us faith in the written Word of God. There is one truth in particular the Bible declares that is foundational for understanding our new role. It is that there is one man only in this brave new kingdom of which we have been made a part—the Man, Christ Jesus—and that the rest of us are in Him (see Eph. 2:15; Gal. 3:28).

This means that if anything is to be done—anything, anytime, anywhere—the Lord must do it. He said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Once we have become Christians, we must function within the

parameters of our new reality. The new reality is that during this life there is only Christ Jesus and us hidden in Him. "For [the old] you [has] died and your [new] life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). Only what He does is valid.

Salvation makes us privy to and a part of this divine, new reality. Our Lord made a choice—a decision—in eternity. Because of this decision, He established the pattern, or key, by which all mankind could be drawn into union with God.

Our Lord emptied Himself by setting aside forever His own self-expression so that—for love's sake—He might reveal only His Father. He said, "I can do nothing on My own initiative" (John 5:30; see also 12:49).

Paul said, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5, KJV). The word for "mind" here means attitude or mind-set, the frame of mind that Christ had from before the beginning of time, continued to have while He was on Earth and will have forever in heaven (see Heb. 13:8). This mind-set is that of living not to express Himself but to express His Father.

Likewise, His disciples are "no longer [to] live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:15; see also 4:10-11, NASB). There is no other way to become His disciple but to deny oneself forever so that His self may be manifested (see Matt. 16:24-25; Luke 14:26-27).

These words are within the high priestly prayer of Jesus: "That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us" (John 17:21).

Have you ever wondered how this high priestly prayer could be answered? As Jesus emptied Himself of His own self-life, we are to allow the Holy Spirit to empty us of the natural or fleshly expression of our own selves. We are to be emptied of "the old" so that we might receive "the new"—Him in every way.

As the Father is being expressed through the Son and the Son through the believers, the Father and Son—by the power of the Holy Spirit—are being manifested through the disciple. “I in them, and Thou [Father] in Me, that they may be perfected in unity [with Us]” (v. 23). What power! What oneness!

Truly for Christians, this is a win-win situation. When we are born again, we are seated with Christ in heavenly places (see Eph. 2:6). We share His place in heaven, and He takes our place on Earth. Jesus said, “Abide in Me [in Heaven], and I [will abide] in you [on Earth]” (John 15:4). He does all the work, and we get the eternal rewards.

We receive the blessings and rewards of deeper union if we allow the Holy Spirit to empty us of our old self-expression (see Gal. 5:16). Once the truth has been revealed to us that “it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20) and that He alone can do anything—we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to make that truth real in our lives.

The mind is crucial in this process since the mind is the most complex and potentially dangerous part of the soul. It reasons, judges, imagines, recognizes, ponders, remembers, understands, evaluates, knows, concludes—and above all, seeks wisdom (see Prov. 8:11). Wisdom is what Eve desired in order to determine on her own what was good and what was evil (see Gen. 3:5-6).

We all know the characteristics of a fleshly mind. It is arrogant, self-centered, devious, prideful, deceitful—all the things we dislike in others (see Gal. 5:19-21).

The mind of Christ is revealed in love, joy, peace, patience and so on—all the attributes we admire, applaud and desire. If we are to love the Lord our God with “all our mind” (see Mark 12:30), certainly that mind will need to be the mind of Christ—not our sin-sodden, human one.

SETTING OUR MINDS

This brings us to the second step in the process of acquiring the mind of Christ. In addition to having faith in and acting on the truth of the Word, we must take a stand with the Holy Spirit against the use of our old or fleshly minds.

The Word tells us that the Holy Spirit is zealous to resist our old nature. "For the flesh sets its desire against [strongly opposes] the Spirit, and the Spirit against the that [the old] you may not do the things that you please" (Gal. 5:17).

If we will stand with the Holy Spirit, He will render inoperable the "old," thereby allowing the "new"—the mind of Christ—to rush in to fill the void. But we must agree to having the "old" confined by the Spirit, as a prisoner is on death row—without reprieve. We are to learn to "take every thought captive and make it obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5, Good News Bible). By this means, all our words and acts will witness to His character.

We need to realize that living above in Christ is the normal Christian life—the only life we have at this stage. Anything else is subnormal and unreal.

It is not a goal that only the most saintly aspire to. It is the gift of God to all believers who will seek it. It is simply to abide where we have been placed in Christ.

Often we have been so conditioned by our former life that we think if we "set our minds on things above," we will be evading earthly responsibilities—something akin to "sticking our heads in the sand." Nothing is further from the truth.

Living above in Christ while we still walk and work on earth is "the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14, NASB). The foundation of this highest calling for every believer is to "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

The ability to set one's mind on things above comes from a heart that "is fixed," or steadfast, on God, as David's was. "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise" (Ps. 57:7, KJV).

David also said, "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps. 16:8). The word "set" means to put someone in a particular place. To set the mind means to cause it to pass into a given state or condition and remain there.

HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST

How can we know if our minds are "set"? Here are some of the signs that the mind of Christ is operating in our lives:

Singing to God. A joyful heart prompts the mind to sing or make melodies to God whenever the mind is not required to speak to others or concentrate on some task. During much of every day we are doing routine things that leave our minds and voices (when we are alone) free to sing thanks and praise for all things. We begin to speak less to people and sing more to God.

Pulling away from the world. The world system that exalts the human loses its attraction, and we let the passing panorama of Earth go its way.

Simplicity. Life on earth becomes simpler and our needs fewer.

Love. Love and peace are in us not only for all the saints but also for lost humanity because we see the lost as potential saints in Christ.

Change in focus. There is less need to call attention to ourselves or claim any good as our own. There is less prayer for ourselves, and there are more petitions for Christ to be exalted in everything.

Cessation of striving. There is a lack of striving, worry, or haste because we are doing all in God's presence and for His

sake.

Avoidance of sin. Sin becomes more and more unthinkable and painful. There is a holy fear of dishonoring or profaning God's character (name).

Quiet spirit. A gentle quietness is in our spirits as we rest continually in Christ.

Acknowledging God. We place less emphasis on how much we are doing and more emphasis on who is doing it—acknowledging God in all things. The unseen becomes more real than the seen.

Abandonment. We entrust the whole of our earthly existence into God's hands so that Christ is glorified through us.

Focus on God. Some of our deepest pain comes from realizing at day's end how much time went by during the day when we were not thinking of, praising or thanking God.

Our new lives in Christ bring with them a whole new way of living. Much of what we learned in our "old" lives becomes obsolete as we take our positions in heavenly places and begin to operate with the mind of Christ.

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