

99-01-15a Colossians

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of the Word of God this evening with a moment of prayer. Father, we take this opportunity at the beginning of our time of fellowship in your Word to review our day and to review the status of our souls. We thank you for your grace and for getting us of our sins and cleansing us and enabling us to have insight and understanding into things that are too high and too great for us in our human frailty to understand.

We thank you for the place that you have assigned us in your plan. We thank you for the enabling power of your Spirit and the transforming power of your Word. We pray tonight that as we study these words from the Apostle Paul delivered to us down through the centuries under the ministry of your Spirit that we will comprehend these things and be educated by them, that our perspective will be an accurate one.

We will see our lives as lived before you and that as a result our fruitfulness will increase and the extent to which we glorify our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will increase. We pray these things in his name. Amen.

We resume our study of Paul's letter to Colossae tonight in chapter 3. You will remember that Paul has been addressing the presence of and the putting forward of distortions and substitutions by way of philosophies and types of religions, religious ideas, systems of priorities, systems of measurement in the environment in which these particular believers lived. It's a wonderful letter for us to review because we live in just such a society today. Of course, believers in every generation are faced with this.

What is true and what is false? We have in our national headlines a big investigation that at least purportedly has as its goal determining what is true and what is false. It's one thing to investigate things that happen in the earthly realm, circumstances, the testimony of witnesses, the analysis of evidence, gathering of facts that could be substantiated by the eye or by science or in some other way. It's quite a different task to identify and substantiate truth in the invisible realm.

How do we know that what we believe is correct and that we're not just one of many, many, many traditions or denominations or little subgroups of Christians, each of which has an equal likelihood of being right or wrong or perhaps nobody's right or nobody's wrong. It's just sort of every man for himself. Come to an understanding that you're comfortable with and move on forward and let the chips fall where they may.

If you're happy and if you are satisfied and if people like to say, well, if that works for you, that's great. If that's working for you, Mormonism is working for you or being this kind of a denomination or that kind of a church, well, that's great. That works for you.

Paul is reminding us that there is an absolute standard of measurement. There is an absolute standard of truth to which we go if we're interested to discover whether or not we are in the faith.

It's not nebulous.

It's not unattainable. It's not too high or too far away to be accessed. God says it is near.

It is in your heart. It is in your mouth. It's on your lips.

We have the opportunity to establish the truth of what we believe in the spiritual realm. Most people in the world... I heard a discussion earlier this week about, well, in the realm of religion, really all bets are off. Almost anything... This was a PBS... Actually, not PBS.

It was public radio. What is that? Yes, National People's Radio, where they were talking about one of the men who was a phone-in guest, sort of is the host of a program that's aired by PBS that investigates religious issues. So they were talking about, well, how can you do this and be successful when you run the risk of treading on people's toes and so forth.

He was talking about how necessary it was to be balanced and to respect everyone's beliefs. He said it was helpful to be a man of faith himself and to realize the important role that religion can play in someone's life. But the tone of the whole discussion between these three or four men was that, well, all of these religions have a more or less equal claim to validity because they're meaningful to the person.

Because the person finds it meaningful, the person finds it helpful. It gets them through their day and through their life. That is their merit, and that's their value, and that's the reason to treat them all more or less equally.

In a sense, the hidden argument there is it doesn't really matter which one you have or that you have any at all. It's all relative and it's all subjective. Paul says no.

The Word of God says no. There is a God. There is an absolute standard of truth.

And it is discoverable. It has been revealed. It is attainable.

God did not create us and give us the opportunity for relationship with himself and then make it impossible to know him or impossible to know whether or not you're on the right road to him. What is the primary identity of the Lord Jesus Christ? How does he identify himself to us? He says, I am the way to the Father in John 14.6. You can't get to the Father except by me. Well, there is a concrete, knowable body of truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not nebulous. It's not obscure. It's not subject to various interpretations.

But this is what people have tried to say. This is what has come about as sort of an understanding. Well, you can see Jesus walking through the field of daisies holding everyone by the hand.

It doesn't really matter if he's got blond hair or brown hair, blue eyes or brown eyes. If you want to view him as Chinese or black or some other race, if that works for you, if you're comfortable with a Jesus that has slanted eyes because you have slanted eyes or you're comfortable with a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus because you're Caucasian and so forth, well, that's really okay. No, it's not.

It's not okay because it's not true. The Jesus that is all compassion and love and has no standard of righteousness, who never takes up the whip and cleanses the temple, who never stands up and condemns the Pharisees for hypocrisy, for apathy, for going astray themselves and leading others astray, that is a false Christ. It's a false truth.

It's a false Christianity. There is right and there is wrong. There is truth and there is error, and it's knowable.

So when these competing philosophies and alternate understandings of Christianity crop up, this isn't Buddhism or some bizarre religion that's being offered as an alternative. These are twists of Christianity. These are additions or changes or retro-Christianity.

Everybody talks about, well, there was this legalism. The Jews were hung up on the mosaic. Well, it was sort of a retro.

We have this happening today. Everybody wants to go back in time. They had this big sort of dreamy-eyed reminiscence of Woodstock, and now we've got people going back to wearing bell-bottoms and platform shoes and resurrecting one of the worst substitutes for music that ever hit the landscape, things that we, you know, people used to wear T-shirts, stamp out disco in our lifetime, and we finally did, and now it's coming back.

It's having its own little resurrection. And the awful, gaudy colors and the terrible styles, and now you walk downtown in Dallas and you feel like somebody fell out of an old picture in your high school annual and dropped into the landscape. But people have this, there's a nostalgia that I guess is a part of some, if not all of us, that likes to hark back to olden days.

It's familiar. It's known. Like Barbara Streisand used to say, what's too painful to remember, we choose to forget.

And so when we look back, it's the laughter, you know, the memory songs she sings. There is a grain of valid observation that we do have selective memory. We tend to remember good things on our good days and forget the bad.

Well, this was retro-Christianity. People remembered the good old days of the Mosaic Law when things were easy and clear. You had a book of rules, and you could go to the rules, and if you kept the rules, you could say, I'm righteous.

And you didn't have personal responsibility for your thought life and where you let your eyes wander and where you let your imagination wander and what your motives were in keeping those rules. Those were the good old days. Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end.

We'd sing and laugh and sacrifice a lamb or whatever. But this was appealing. And these things hook into our psyche.

They're not unappealing. They're not big, bad things in a red devil suit with a forked tongue and a tail coming up saying, I'm a sinful twist on Christianity. They're appealing.

They hook into us at some level. Some of us feel really guilty. And so if you have a really strong works element in a perversion of Christianity, this is going to hook a lot of us.

And we're going to think, yeah, this feels right. This appeals to me. This works for me.

Other things have a real altruistic. We're going to stamp out abortion clinics. We're going to do social good.

We're going to mend evil. We're going to get that nasty old NEA and their terrible pictures of crucifixes and jars of urines off the walls of museums. And we're going to do this, we're going to do that, we're going to do the other.

We're going to accomplish social good. And this is good in anybody's eyes. Anybody with a reasonable conscience is going to realize that we're doing righteousness here.

And that's going to hook in and appeal to certain people. And they're going to say, yes, this feels right. This works for me.

This is Christianity. Many other examples. You can fill in the blanks.

Look at the kinds of Christianity that are around us. Some people, their daily life is unhappy. Their circumstances in the home are unhappy.

Their homes are broken. Their relationships are in rags and tatters. They don't get emotional satisfaction from their personal life.

So what do they do? They'll go down to a group of like-minded people who are equally hurting, who are equally emotionally unsatisfied. They'll all get together and create a satisfying emotional experience. And they say, this feels right.

This works for me. We're talking about God, aren't we? And they're waving their hands and they're singing repetitious praise songs. Oh, how I love Jesus.

Praise him, praise him. They never say why or what for. Because the purpose, God is the means

to an end.

And the end is I want a satisfying emotional experience that I lack in my daily life. And this is going to hook into the psyche. This is going to be appealing.

And it's going to feel good. It's going to feel right. And it's a perversion of Christianity.

But when you use the standard that, hey, it works for me, people are going to say, well, don't bother me with the facts. This is good. This is right.

I think this is biblical Christianity. And it's not. And when you look at the myriad of different permutations of this kind of thing, we want a religion specifically for believers.

We want a Christianity that feels good to us and that works for us, that kind of makes our day brighter and is appealing and satisfying. If that's the standard, I can end up anywhere, depending on the particular psychological makeup and complement of experiences that I bring to the table. Any one of a number of things may be appealing to me and may feel satisfying to me.

So how can you possibly distinguish when you've got all of these different variations? That's why we've got 450 different denominations in the United States with different emphases and different strengths and weaknesses and taking different parts of biblical Christianity and emphasizing or deemphasizing them, different parts of secular culture and secular wisdom and knowledge, incorporating those, and you get a particular mix. You think about chili. Every year in Texas they have big chili cook-offs.

How many different recipes, how many different kinds of chili do you think there are just in the state of Texas? How many different bowls of chili do you think you could come across? Different amounts of beans, different amounts of chili peppers, different kinds. There are people here in Texas who can tell you all the different subspecies of chili peppers, which ones are hot, which ones flash in your mouth right away and then die out, and which ones give you a slow burn and wind up making you sweat an hour after you eat them. Different people like different things, and so there are as many different kinds of chili as there are people making it, practically.

You get the feeling that that's kind of what Christianity has become. It's a recipe for chili, and everybody's kind of worked out their own. People like to go to the Bible and say, Well, work out your own salvation.

We're just going to work out our own religion here. Well, this is the kind of thing that was happening in Colossae, and we've covered that and we've reviewed that in some detail. What is Paul doing? What did he do in Chapter 2, and what is he going to go forward and do in Chapter 3? First of all, he says, Look, this idea that it depends on what you think or it depends on how you feel is wrong.

These people are appealing to you based on experience, based on how it makes them feel. They

think they have insight into invisible things. They think they have communion with invisible messengers.

They want to make an issue out of the messenger and his personality or his spin on things or his sense of humor or his qualifications. My pastor is more qualified than your pastor. My pastor has had five years of Greek and three years of Hebrew.

Oh, well, my pastor has had seven years of Greek and five years of Hebrew. Oh, well, my pastor is a doctor. My pastor has been the president of this convention and that association and so forth.

Oh, well, our church has got this ministry. You see, none of this can ever resolve what's true and what's false because it's all based on what impresses me or what works for me, what hooks in and appeals to me and I find satisfying. That's not the standard.

So if you think about an overview of what Paul has talked about in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, what has he done? He has laid out objective truth. You remember the wonderful doxology about the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul says, Look, this whole thing centers around Jesus Christ. He's the head.

He is the God-man. He is the man who stands in heaven. He is the God who has stood on earth.

There is an objective, knowable body of facts and wisdom about the Lord Jesus Christ and that's the standard. How closely does any brand of Christianity adhere to the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ? That's the standard. That's the knowable objective truth that defines real, God-given, Father-based Christianity because Christianity is not even really the Christ-centered life.

It is the Father-centered life through Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ came and did an incredible amount of work to bring us to the Father through himself. He's left us the Holy Spirit to bring us to the Father.

This is what we're going to see when we start chapter 3. Paul is going to continue hammering on the facts. This is how, in an objective world, you win a court case, like we see in the media here in this past week and we're going to see in the coming weeks with our national government. In an objective world, and I have no confidence that this is going to turn out based on objective truth, but in an objective world, you win a case based on the facts.

Paul is not going to try to diagnose and knock down every strawman type of Christianity with all of their little hooks and appeals. He talks about them in general terms and he says, look, the way to discern what's false is to know what's true. If you know the truth, you can identify any kind of error that comes up.

This is the wonderful thing about our life in Christ, our life before the Father, because when we know the truth, we don't have to have a listing of every different kind of error. We know what's true and anything that comes up that doesn't match that truth is not true. Knowing the truth is our

best defense against whatever may come up.

We don't need a class in New Age philosophy. We don't need a class in everything that's wrong with Mormonism. Sometimes people feel guilty because a Jehovah's Witness came to my door the other day or a Mormon came to my door the other day and they were prepared and they had their materials and they were trying to convince me to be a Mormon.

So people say, well, let's have a seminar, let's buy a book, and let's get a brochure and try to learn everything that the Mormons believe or everything that the Jehovah's Witnesses believe. You don't need to do any of that. To know valuable antiques, people don't go to the junkyard and pick through all the rotting garbage that they've got out at the city dump and say, well, this is not a valuable antique.

This is not a valuable antique. Well, this here is certainly not a valuable antique. Look at this old cardboard orange juice can out here and look at this crumpled aluminum and this old plastic packaging and all this other stuff that's out in the city dump.

You don't study the wrong thing to know what's right. If you find knowledge and you spend your time studying, you watch the Antique Roadshow and you think, boy, I really need to know about those antiques. Those things are valuable sometimes.

But you watch the experts on that show. They know the difference between a good fake and a genuine antique. I saw these two twin brothers that get on that show.

If you haven't watched the Antique Roadshow, you ought to watch it at least once because it's very entertaining. There's twin brothers that know a lot about furniture and chairs and hutches and that kind of thing. So they were talking about this.

Some lady brought in a chair and the thing looked old to me. It looked crusty. It had all the appearance.

If you look in a book and see a picture, you'd say, hey, this thing was done in the 1600s or the 1700s. One of the twin brothers there was talking about it. He said, at a first glance, this looks like a really old chair.

Then he started talking about the way that it was built. The one thing I remember about this is he was pointing to the arm of the chair. He said, if you look at the way this arm is carved, it's a curving arm.

It comes up and then the front where your hand would rest when you're sitting in the chair rolls under. It's got a little cut-in scroll work there, a little curve that rolls around. He said, the curve is insincere.

This kind of reminds me of what people say about wine. They use some human attribute for the

wine. It's a saucy little wine or it's an impudent little sherry or something like that.

They call it impudent, like a liquid can be impudent. When he was talking about this chair arm, he said, if you look at this, it's an insincere. It's not cut deeply.

It doesn't have the flourish that a real chair has. Then he went over and he showed what a genuine chair looks like. The reason he could characterize that as insincere is he is so familiar with the real thing.

Any fake chair that anybody brings up, he can say, I can tell by looking. It isn't a measurement. It wasn't a little scientific thing.

The real chair has exactly an inch and a half scroll here. He could look at it and recognize it as false. This is what Paul is encouraging us to do in this letter.

He says, don't try to sort out and take notes and do a scientific investigation of everything that might be wrong with these false versions of Christianity. Concentrate on what is true and you will be able to discern what is false. Over in Hebrews, the mature had their senses exercised to discern good and evil.

How do you get your senses exercised to know what's true and what's false? Concentrate on what is true. Think on these things. That is why in chapter 3, verse 1, Paul says, If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Our temptation is to get distracted and say, this is a terrible attack on Christianity. Look at the subtleties and look at the characteristics of this false view of Christianity.

Let's study it. Let's become an expert on it. Let's know everything about this false thing.

Paul says, no, don't set your mind on these things. Set your mind on things that are above. This is what we want to talk about a little bit tonight.

Why doesn't Paul say, set your mind on systematic theology? That's what I would say. That's what I did when I went to seminary. I thought, if you're going to go to seminary and try to be an individual who is thoroughly versed in the word of God, then you ought to know it from beginning to end.

You ought to know everything about it, know all of the categories. I was a systematic theology major. I figured that way you'll know all of the different ologies.

I'm audiology, soteriology, Christology, pneumatology, eschatology, all of the different categories, so that you can go anywhere in the Bible and fit it into a framework that forms an integrated

whole. I still think that's a good idea. But Paul's way of saying that is, set your mind on things above.

If someone is bringing a perverted view, and it's easy. You turn on Christian television, you're going to see the perverted view. Pick up a Christian publication.

Go into the aisle at the bookstore where the Christian books are, or go into a Christian bookstore. You're going to see 900 different subtle or blatant perversions of the truth. Do we need to go in there and try to figure out what's wrong with each one of those? No.

Paul says, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of the Father. Each one of these phrases is significant. Sometimes we read through these things, and it's almost like, well, Paul is using this phrase as just sort of a filler.

He's just using this religious language. He could have just thought, set your mind on things above. Why does he say that above is where Christ is? Why does he mention the fact that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father? What does that have to do with setting your mind on things above? Isn't that a part of a different discussion? I thought spiritual blessings in heavenly places and God is in heaven.

Why does he mention these specific things? There's a specific reason for this, which we're going to look at tonight. Then in verse 2 he says, set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Well, what are the things above? Here I am living my life, driving my car, bent as it is, having been rear-ended here recently by a careless driver and having to go through all the hassle that that involves.

I've got earthly problems. I have earthly tasks to perform. I have inconveniences.

I have frustrations. I have responsibilities. I have pleasures and blessings and wonderful things.

But I've got a whole set of circumstances that tie me very intimately to daily life. So is Paul saying I should sort of evacuate the earthly view and just sit around and meditate on, well, how many angels can dance on the head of a pin or some such thing? What does he mean when he says set your mind on things above? What are the things above? Pop quiz, the professor says. Take out a blank sheet of paper and list all of the things above that you can think of.

Well, you know, most of us would have trouble getting to ten. Well, let's see. God, angels, Christ at the right hand of the Father.

What else is above? Well, we're going to look at that tonight so that when he says set your mind on things above, we'll know what those things are. There ought to be more than two or three things. What does it mean to set your mind on God? How is that helpful? Why is it helpful to think of God as being above? Well, we want to take a look at what the Scripture has to say about that.

So let's begin. Seeking those things which are above. One of the great things that we can do is go back to the Bible that Paul's audience had, the Bible that Paul himself had access to, and that's the Old Testament Scriptures.

Look at Psalm 16 and verse 11. Psalm 16 and verse 11. What does it mean to seek the things that are above? Psalm 16 is a miktam of David.

He is singing a song to the Lord. He is praying to the Lord. And based on his experience and knowledge of what God has done for him, he says in verse 9, My heart is glad, my glory rejoices.

My flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life.

In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. David, in the Old Testament, knew that God was in heaven.

He knew that he would be resurrected to live with God forevermore. And that the pleasures of God, the fullness of joy, the glory in heaven is at God's right hand. Isn't it interesting that this is where the Bible tells us the Lord Jesus Christ is now seated.

Because He is the basis and the fulfillment and the way to all of these things. So already we're beginning to get some insight into why Paul specifically mentions that when we set our minds on things above, that's where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father. Because all of the things that come to us through Christ are the things that are above.

The pleasures forevermore. And this is hope. We've seen many times in the past the triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope and love.

Faith is the means of fulfilling our calling. It's the means of living our life. We are to walk by faith and not by sight.

Hope is our motivation. Why do we go through our day? Why do we accomplish the things that we accomplish as we maintain our cars and go through the responsibilities of our employment and our families and so forth? Because there is a future. Because it's going to mean something, not just now, but in the future.

I can, as I mess around getting my car fixed, turn that time not only into a fixed car, but into glory and joy at the right hand of the Father forevermore. Because it's not just the doing of the task, but it's why I do it. It's how I do it.

It's who I'm relying on as I do it. It's what view I have of that task and its importance in my life. How important is it that I have a car that people can look at and be impressed? Can I exercise better stewardship by having a functional car that is not pretty than by spending \$2,000 more and getting a pretty car because I don't want to be thought of as shabby or having a car that's kind of

bad looking? At first, these things just seem like the mundane details of life, but when you start thinking about our motivation and the reasons for which we do things, it starts to influence the course of our life.

Why do we take the car to the body shop and spend \$2,500 getting it looking perfect and repainted rather than spending \$400 to get the bumper put back on and the taillights functional and let it be a little bent? There's a big difference there, and that's going to affect future decisions and future options. And a big part of why I do what I do depends on what I think, on what my priorities are. Is it a high priority for me to not be seen in a bent car? For some people, it's unthinkable.

I'll get a lenthil before I drive that bent thing around. I can't pull into the parking lot down at work. I can't be seen driving away in this marred, scarred, less than perfect.

Everybody else at the office has got Lexus and Mercedes and Lincolns and Cadillacs. At least if I'm going to drive a Ford, it ought to look good type of thing. You laugh, but you've heard people.

And that may not be the best example, but you can think of examples as far as what clothes do we wear, how hard do we work on cosmetic appearance of things, what glasses frames do we pick, and why do we pick them. Is it to give us the biggest lens so we can have the best peripheral vision, or do we get the little tiny lens because it looks pretty? And maybe we have no peripheral vision, and others are in danger when we drive and so forth, but we look good as they carry us into the hospital on the gurney. Some of these examples are a little absurd, but it is to point out the fact that setting our minds on things above, we can forego temporary pleasures in this life.

We can forego the opinions of others because we're setting our minds on eternal things. Is God pleased when we do our best to be good stewards of what he has given us? God is watching us. He will give us some amount of earthly goods, and then he will evaluate us on our stewardship.

We may not ever have very much, but we are just as accountable for our stewardship of what God gives us as a person that has thousands or millions in the bank or at their disposal. We as believers are accountable before the Lord, and if we're faithful in the little bit that we have here, God knows that we will be faithful in much, and he will reward us with the opportunity to be faithful with much, whether it's time or whether it's opportunity or whether it's money or whether it is any other resource that God can place at our disposal. If we are thinking about those things which are above, we're not worried about what will people think when they look out the window or when they see us walk by or when we come and sit before them.

We're going to think, how can I best serve in my capacity as a child of God, as a steward of God's resources that he's placed at my disposal? What is the best thing that I can do? My personal level of esteem in the eyes of others or my personal embarrassment is not a factor. It is what is best in the eyes of God. Well, this is something we have to practice.

It doesn't come to us by nature. By nature, we are creatures of how will others perceive. I don't normally make specific comments about things that are going on in the national news, but I could not help but be struck during the testimony this week or during the presentation by the House in the impeachment trial of the President that some of the testimony was repeated that was offered during the grand jury proceedings.

When questioned about why, this is a question put to the President, why did you have this conversation on a Sunday at 5 p.m. with your personal secretary, Betty Curry, and why did you go over and ask these questions, I was never alone with her, right? You could see and hear everything that went on, right? And this sort of apparent prompting that he was doing to make sure her testimony would match his own. He was asked, well, why did you ask these questions if it was not to influence her testimony? He said, well, and he had a lot of uhs and ands and hesitations, but he said, basically, I wanted to, he had already given his testimony, by the way, the previous day. But he said, well, I wanted to ascertain what the facts were.

So he had already given testimony as to the facts, and then he said, well, I was running over this with her because I wanted to find out what the facts were. Well, you get the idea that fact, you want to talk about splitting hairs and having definitions, what is the definition of a fact? A fact is the presentation of information in a way that is beneficial to me and doesn't get me in trouble. So a fact isn't really a fact, a truth isn't really a truth.

I wanted to ascertain what story I could put forward that will get me out of hot water. Well, when we set our minds on things above, we can disregard the consequences of being truthful and being honest and being accurate. You go to a place and you're going to buy a used car.

I had this experience this week. And they say, well, I'm going to make out the bill of sale here, and the amount that you're paying for this car, of course, is going to be how much your tags cost and what taxes you pay and so forth. It's going to be based on the sale price of this car.

What do you want me to put down? I misunderstood the question because I was doing a car trade-in. We were in the process of negotiating a thing where I would trade in my bent car and put some other money with and get this other car. I thought this was the bill of sale for my car.

So I said, well, you know, X hundred dollars. So they wrote this on the bill of sale and got it all finished out, and I was reading upside down what was on this. I said, now is this the bill of sale for my car or for the one I'm buying from you? They said, oh, this is the one we're selling you.

Well, this was measurable in thousands, the one that I was buying. But without any hesitation, we're going to put down this favorable rate that's only in hundreds so that when you go to the government and get ready to pay your taxes and get your tags and so forth, this car only costs you X hundred instead of X thousand. And this seems to just be common practice.

Well, what would you like me to put down for the purchase price? And I, misunderstanding, said, you know, this number, a hundred dollars, and I just wrote it down and prepared the thing as though that's all I was paying for this car. Well, that's, in some points of view, would seem to be a favorable thing. Well, now there's good stewardship.

Look at what I'm going to save in taxes and so forth. But it's wrong. Do I trust God that if I do the right thing, he will make provision? If he owns the cattle on a thousand hills, if he has unlimited resources at his disposal, he is interested in me having integrity and doing the right thing, regardless of how much money it costs me or how much taxes I have to pay.

If I had set my mind on things above, I can be perfectly accurate and truthful in all of my dealings, in every form I fill out, and in everything I sign my name to, even if it costs money, even if it appears to damage me, even if it appears to put me in a bad light or cause me trouble or cause me grief. This is an expression of faith. I trust because I'm more interested in God approving whatever the earthly consequences than I am in trying to make my earthly circumstances turn out well.

This is the difference between setting our mind on earthly things and setting our mind on heavenly things. And whether it's financial or personal or relationship-based or whatever else it may be, Paul says this is a standard of truth. Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.

That's a fact. He was true to the plan of God and disregarded the consequences to himself. He didn't think equality with God was a thing to be grasped and held, emptied himself and took on the form of a servant, and was obedient to the plan of God, obedient even unto death, the death of the cross, which was humiliating and embarrassing and degrading.

People get up in arms and file lawsuits and so forth if they think they've been degraded in any way, shape, or form. If someone makes an offhand comment that seems to somehow diminish their status, they're all over the place trying to get that corrected and trying to get the law on their side to make sure it's leveled because we're so concerned with earthly things. Where is our concern for heavenly things? Are we willing to risk money for God's approval to do the right thing and have a huge tax burden as a result? Are we willing to do the right thing if it means the loss of people's good opinion or we're misunderstood or it's misinterpreted but we know it's the right thing? What if it looks like it's going to cause us to go under? What if it looks like disaster awaits? What bigger disaster is there than being executed in a humiliating manner? That's what Jesus put on the line to be obedient to the Father.

Where is He now? Did He find the Father's approval? Was His life and His death and His fulfillment of God's plan pleasing in God's sight? Yes, it was. Though in this life on earth He suffered a humiliating death, when it says the death of the cross, that's not a glorious statement. That's a statement of the humiliation and embarrassment of it.

He was obedient even to the death on a cross. He didn't have a grand, glorious... If Hollywood was doing this and thinking up the story of how can Christ offer Himself on our behalf, He would ascend a grand set of steps and lay calmly down on a grand altar and a great bolt of lightning would come from the sky and God would execute judgment and it would be grand and glorious and the self-sacrificial nature of it would be brought up and it would be told in heroic, epic ways. This was a nasty, gruesome, ugly, humiliating death.

Jesus knew that it would be that way. He knew that everyone would forsake Him. He knew that He and His followers would be branded as criminals and as enemies of the state and enemies of true religion and so forth.

But He set that aside because His eyes were on the goal. And now, where is He? He's seated at the right hand of the Father. So He had His mind set on things above.

And when Paul says, set your mind on things above, seek those things which are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father, that's supposed to remind us of something. There is a greater prize than good circumstances. There's a greater prize than somebody's good opinion.

There is the prize of the upward calling of Christ Jesus, the satisfaction of God the Father. David knew this in the Old Testament. There is joy, there are pleasures forevermore at your right hand.

David had his mind set on things above when he wrote this psalm. And in his good days and in the good phases of his life, that's where his mind was set. When did David stumble? When he set his mind on earthly things.

When he was worried about whether or not his son would die. When he was worried about personal gratification with women. When he was worried about disrupting relationships with his sons and didn't discipline them and didn't execute justice as he should.

He set his mind on earthly things and he got in trouble. But the greatness of David is that he figured that out and recovered and got his mind back on heavenly things, and that's why he's a man after God's own heart. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see what the Scriptures have to say about those things which are above. We've established in general that these are the things that Christ focused on. Christ himself is there, seated at the Father's right hand.

What else does the Bible say about those things that are above? That's what we'll see when we come back.