

Earthly-mindedness – Phil 3.19

Lesson 1: What is earthly-mindedness?

Introduction

It's noteworthy that most of the disciplining judgments poured out by God on His own people are in response to His people's worldliness or earthly-mindedness. Scripture is filled with examples. When His people lose sight of their having been separated from the world and given a citizenship in heaven, and they begin to think and walk and live like those bound to the earth and made for the earth, the Lord usually intervenes with awakening hardships to remind them that this world is not their home and that their citizenship is in heaven, where they're already seated in the Spirit with Christ, who is their life, Col 3

One of the greatest problems with earthly-mindedness is that it's very hard to see; and one of the greatest dangers of it is that it's very destructive to a life lived for the glory of God and in the joy of God.

It will do our souls good to study not only the *nature* of earthly-mindedness and why it's so evil in God's eyes, but also the great *difference* between it and what it means to have our conversation and citizenship in heaven (Phil 3.20) as those who walk with God (Gen 5.24).

- I. In Phil 3.17-20, the Apostle is urging his readers to imitate him and all those who walk with God in holy conversation and conduct and whose citizenship is in heaven (cf. 1Pet 1.15; 2Pet 3.11) and to not follow after the pattern of those who are *enemies of the cross of Christ*. Why? Because *their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things*.
 - A. Paul says something similar in Rom 8.5, *those who living according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh*. Which shows us that the great importance of setting our minds on something is that it necessarily translates into how we live and behave. In other words, we *live* according to what we *mind*. *Earthly-mindedness*, then, inevitably translates into *earthly-living*. And when this happens among the people of God, God sends them a wake up call, a rebuke, and if necessary, an afflicting providence, Mt 16.23; Jer 18.11-17; 44.28; Hos 13.4-8
 - B. Thus there's a great difference between a wicked man and a godly man: one *minds earthly things* and the other *behaves as a citizen of heaven*, because he minds the things of heaven.
- II. **When** do we mind earthly things in a sinful way?
 - A. When we look upon earthly things as the greatest of all things, as THE things, Mt 6.19-21
 1. God gives His people the blessings of heaven as well as the blessings of earth (Gen 27.28); but those who mind heavenly things as their best things are not tied to the earthly things as if their happiness were bound up in them, Ps 73.25-26; 2Sam 19.24-30.
 - a) *What do you consider to be your most prized possession?
 - B. When the best of our thoughts is busy with earthly things, Ps 4.6
 1. Our thoughts are the effervescence (i.e. the bubbling up) of our heart's affections in that whatever our heart is set upon, *that's* what we most think about. In fact, our words and actions are nowhere near as good an indicator as our thoughts of what's in our heart—because the thoughts spring immediately from the heart.
 2. A man may keep his words and actions in check out of respect for others and never reveal what's really in his heart. But if you could read his thoughts, you'd know his heart.
 - a) *The same is true for each of us. If you want to know where your heart's at, don't judge it by an account of your words and actions before others. Instead, consider what goes in the inner chambers of your mind—not every random thought that springs up or that Satan interjects—but those thoughts that are sweet to you and in which you find contentment and pleasure.

- b) *Through our weakness and Satan's temptations, our minds can often wander this way or that. But what do we think about when we're alone? And what sort of thinking do we delight in? An unclean person will nurse unclean, earthly thoughts; but a child of God should meditate on and delight in God and His law (Ps 1). Can you see why Paul tells us to *take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*, 2Cor 10.5?
- C. When our whole heart clings to the earth, Jdg 14.1-3
1. When a man's mind is earthly, he can't be taken off from it. You can tell him how vain and empty it is, how harmful it is to his soul, how dangerous it is to his welfare, how it robs him of real and lasting joys and peace, but nothing you say can take him off from it. His heart clings to it still, Jdg 14.1-3
- D. When our hearts are filled with distracting cares about the things of earth, Mt 6.25-34
1. There are two things that cause distracting cares about earthly things.
 - a) The fear that we'll be deprived of what we hold to be good and our inability to get by without it. *What if I lose this?! What will I do without it!?*
 - (1) The men of earth look upon the things of the earth as such great things that they believe if they can't get them, then they'll be completely undone. They look upon it as an insufferable hardship to be deprived of the things of the earth and can't imagine life without them.
 - (2) They can't put confidence in their strength, in their money, in the market, in the weather, or in anything to help them prevent the threatening disaster.
 - (3) And they think the promises of God to be the most worst help of all. They imagine that there's no worse or more miserable condition than to be left in a strait with nothing but a promise of God to lean on.
 - (4) *How differently do the heavenly minded fare?! They may lose their estate, they may make a bad investment and lose much of their wealth, the Sabeans and Chaldeans may rob them of their livelihood; but they won't be undone and their happiness won't be gone. Because when all their comforts are gone, they'll still have their happiness since *God is their chief joy*. An earthly man has his portion in this life and when it's gone has nothing left; but a godly man has a treasure in heaven that neither thief, nor moth, nor rust can reach.
 - b) The uncertainty in our having the means to prevent the evil.
 - (1) If a heavenly minded man looks on his outward means, he knows them to be uncertain, but he has a promise of God to trust to, e.g. *I will never leave you nor forsake you*, and he sees this as a certain means to trust in and a solid ground to build upon, and so he avoids anxiety and fear.
 - (2) But an earthly minded man is distracted and troubled because he looks on himself as undone if he loses these things and he has nothing beside them to rest upon for his welfare or happiness.
- E. When the great business of our hearts and endeavors are about the things of earth.
1. Earthly minded men are like children with their games. Children pour their whole selves into it with such might that it equals and matches their hearts. So, an earthly minded man loves and uses the earth as if it equals and matches all his desires. The things of the earth swallow up and consume all his heart and might.
 2. A heavenly minded man may be as busy with the world as others, but he uses it as though he didn't because its objects aren't equal to his desires (1Cor 7.31). He has much stronger, spiritual desires that he reserves for higher things, the things of God. A gracious soul follows his business, provides for his family, and enjoys earth's good comforts, but he does so as one who must engage with God in prayer at the end of each day and stand before God in judgment at the end of his life.

3. *Think of it this way*: an earthly minded man will do some things that are spiritual; but because his heart isn't in them he does them as if he didn't do them (cf. Ezk 33.30-31). A heavenly minded man will do some things that are earthly (cf. 1Tim 5.8); but because his heart isn't in them (but in God), he does them as if he did them not (cf. Col 3.22-24).
- F. When we seek any earthly thing for itself and not in subordination to some greater end.
1. When heavenly minded men seek the things of earth, whether business or study, it's done with an eye to being faithful in his family and generation for the Lord's sake. He seeks those things out of obedience to God. His *earthly* pursuits are *spiritual* in aim and end.
 2. But an earthly minded man seeks his business for the sake of the success and riches and comforts it affords his flesh. And any good or spiritual thing he does is done in subordination to these earthly desires and goals. Thus, an earthly man is earthly in all he does while a spiritual man is spiritual in all he does.
- G. When we are earthly in spiritual things.
1. The best of saints has some earthly mindedness in them and in their spiritual duties; but the earthly minded man is dominated by earthly ends and motives.
- H. When the difficulties of earthly mindedness are as nothing to us.
1. An earthly minded man braves a great many difficulties and toil in getting the things of the earth but he never wearies of it because he loves what he does and is in love with what he seeks. Just as the fish never tires of swimming because it's in its proper element, so an earthly man never tires of running after the things of the earth. He'll brave the weather, he'll cut short his sleep, he'll travel wide and far, he'll spend all his money, and suffer many a hazard, all without complaint, in the pursuit of the world.
 - a) But bring him to church, and the service is too early, the sermon is too long, the Bible is boring, the songs put you to sleep, and the people are fake. In the matters of the earth, he can work like a horse and never be out of breath, but every mole hill is a mountain in spiritual things, Mal 1.13; Amos 8.5
 2. To a heavenly minded man, the Sabbath is a delight, the forerunner of his heart's eternal joy in the kingdom of heaven. He finds it a day of pleasure and goes through its spiritual duties with ease, because he has a mind to do it (Neh 4.6) and it's his proper element.
- I. When we think of the spiritual truths of Scripture in an earthly way.
1. For instance, an earthly minded man thinks of God for His gifts and of heaven as a place free of pain and full of glory; while a heavenly minded man thinks of God for Himself and of heaven as a place where his heart will finally enjoy the full, unhindered fellowship of the Triune God.

Questions

1. How do *our* hearts compare with these marks?
2. Where do we find earthly mindedness in our lives?
3. Can we see how earthly mindedness pollutes our spiritual duties?
4. What do we think of earthly mindedness in itself? Is it a great sin or a small matter? Is it as bad or worse than the gross sins of the second table of the Law?
5. In the end, what does God say about earthly mindedness?