

***Introduction...***

We have come to the point in this letter where things are going to shift from theology to practice. The first 2 chapters were devoted to Christian Doctrine (Who Jesus is, What He has done, and Why does it all matter); but here in **Colossians 3:5** Paul is going to turn the corner and help us understand how all of that doctrine is to impact our day to day life.

But before we jump in to this I want to make sure we understand how our day to day Christian life fits into the bigger picture of the Biblical story.

When God created the heavens and the earth He made them good. The sun and moon were good, the water and dry land were good, the plants and animals were good and then on the sixth day God made man. Adam and Eve were unique among the created things and God pointed this out when He looked at them and called them **“very good.”**

They were made in God’s image. They were made with the capacity to have a relationship with God. He walked with them in the Garden. He spoke to them about why He made them, what they were going to do and how they were going to enjoy His creation. Adam and Eve were residents of this earth but because God dwelled with them, they were partial residents of Heaven.

Heaven is not some ethereal location hidden out in the cosmos; Heaven is the place where God dwells. So When God would come into the Garden to talk to Adam and Eve, He was bringing Heaven with Him. Adam and Eve were able to enter Heaven and come into God’s presence because at that point their hearts hadn’t been corrupted by sin, their eyes had never seen the horror that would come, their hands and feet had never come into contact with the corruption and rebellion that would plunge this earth into sin and judgment.

But **Genesis 3** did come bringing sin into the world and into every human heart. Our access to Heaven is barred and out of our sin soaked hearts flow constant rebellion. Our hands grasp what doesn’t belong to us because of the covetous longing in our heart. Our eyes linger on temptations, our hands reach for sinful pleasures, our feet walk toward sin all because of the sinful longing that lies in our hearts. **“The heart is deceitful above all things (Jer 17:9).”**

Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 15:

**V. 18** What comes out of the mouth **proceeds from the heart**, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person...”

***Transition...***

The Bible tells us that the corruption in our heart is what gives rise to the sin in our lives and the sin in our lives gives rise to the judgment of God. This is the ground floor of Biblical teaching on what is going on in our world. Sin has entered the frame through Adam and Eve, it has spread to all of us and because of that sin we all stand in the path of God’s divine justice.

**So what are we to do?** Most have decided to try and take matters into their own hands and to deal with their sin problem on their own...it will never work. But God so loved the world that He sent Jesus, His true and only Son, to pay for our sin and earn our freedom, through His cross. And where we were once dead in sin, slaves to sin, Christ has set us free.

“My chains are gone, I’ve been set free; My God, My Savior has ransomed me...”

**Jesus came to set us free from the tyranny of our sinful hearts and to lead us into new life free from the functional bondage of sin.** And here in Colossians 3:5-11 Paul is going to help us understand how we are to live in the freedom that Christ has purchased for us.

**Col 3:5** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup>But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup>Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

### ***Sermon Focus...***

The question we are seeking to answer today is how are we to live now that we belong to Jesus. How are we to live now that we have, “received Christ Jesus as Lord (**Col 2:6**).” How are we to live now that we have died with Christ to the elemental spirits of the world (**Col 2:20**)” and now that we “have been raised with Christ to seek the things that are above (**Col 3:1**).”

The first thing we need to understand is that we have a fight on our hands and it is a fight to the death.

### **I. The Christian's Fight (v. 5-6)**

**Col 3:5** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

Paul is using strong language here to help us grasp the seriousness of our daily battle against sin. He calls us to **put to death** the sinful practices and longings that still reside in our heart. He wants us to go to war against the sinful impulses and practices that once ruled our lives as unbelievers. But notice that our fight against indwelling sin is connected to the victory that Christ has already won for us in the eyes of God.

When Paul uses the term **therefore** in verse 5, he is helping us to understand that our battle against sin today is fueled by Christ's victory over sin on the cross. The war has been won but there are still skirmishes to be fought.

**(Illus.** Near the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, behind enemy lines in Nazi Germany there were prison camps. And American soldiers were kept there. In one camp they were not well fed, they were starving, thin discouraged and wondering if they would ever be free and able to go home. One day the guards came and looked upon these malnourished men and saw their downcast faces and slumped over shoulders. On this day like many others the prisoners were not talking to one another because their hope of rescue was almost completely gone.

But on the next day everything changed. They were still behind the fences, they were still unfed but the guard noticed that they were happy and were walking about talking with one another, they were smiling and every now and then the guards would hear a muffled shout of joy and excitement.

What had happened was that someone had smuggled in a small transistor radio and these prisoners heard the news that the Allied forces had landed, they had triumphed and were moving steadfastly inland. And the good news of their coming liberation was powerful enough to

give them life and hope. None of their circumstances had changed, but this news brought about an amazing change...it made them stand up like soldiers once more.

On the cross, Jesus dealt a death blow to sin. He cut off the head of the serpent and claimed victory for all of us who believe. Our task is to embrace that victory and let it give us strength and confidence as we continue to fight against the straggling sins that haven't yet given up their hopeless fight.

**But how are we to fight?** We fight by focusing on the root of our sin. What we see in this passage are two lists of sins: one list deals with sexual sins and the other deals with relational sins. Biblically speaking it shouldn't surprise us at all to see these things on a list of sins.

**Sexual immorality** refers to any type of sex outside of marriage. **Impurity** refers more generally to our overall sexual corruption. **Passion** or **lust** refers to the overwhelming urge or longing to commit the physical act of sexual sin. **Evil desire** is closely related but probably refers more to the mental side of sexual longing.

But the final term in this list gets to the heart of the fight. **Covetousness** or **greed** is the root of the problem and I see in this list a progression from the physical acts of sexual sin (**sexual immorality**) all the way down the motives that give rise to sin (**Covetousness**). In this list Paul moves from the fruit and he traces it all the way back to the root. The root of the problem of sexual sin, or any sin for that matter, is the covetous idolatry that dwells in our heart.

**How is covetousness idolatry?** Doesn't that just mean wanting something that doesn't belong to you? **Covetousness is us wanting what is forbidden.** It is us saying, "I want **this** no matter what God says." And this is idolatry because we are putting our **wants** over the commands of God. Every sin that we commit has a starting point and that starting point is our heart that says, "I will do whatever I want because I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."

Every time we sin against God we are choosing to worship ourselves rather than our creator. That's idolatry and this is where Paul wants us to take the fight...to the root of the problem. To put something to death you have to cut it off at the root, at its line of supply.

Our ongoing fight against sin is ultimately a worship issue. Every day of our Christian life we are going to have to battle against the natural impulse to put our self and our desires on the throne of our hearts. We have to remember that Christ belongs on that throne and we, like Paul, are to die to ourselves daily. Every day we bow to the lordship of Jesus remembering that He saved us by His grace, and He has set us free from the tyranny of our own sinful hearts.

Every day we hear the call of Christ from **Luke 9:23**, "Come after me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." Every day we hear the call to repent from our sin.

Martin Luther began his 95 statements against the teaching of the Roman Catholic church by saying:

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>

Luther's words are still true for us today. The ***Christian's daily fight*** is to set Jesus Christ upon the throne of our hearts as Lord and to put our indwelling sin to death through repentance. Now let's turn our attention to ***the Christian's past***.

## II. The Christian's Past (v. 6-9)

<sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

There is a range of emotion that many of us feel as we read verses 6-7. Verse 6 makes clear that God's wrath ***is coming*** (future tense) and is going to be poured out because of these sins. But for us who believe in Christ and are trusting in Him to save us, there is no more wrath to be poured out. Our sin has been paid in full, even though we once did all of these things.

**1 Cor 6:9** Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

We were headed for destruction but Christ saved us. We deserved judgment but Jesus rescued us and now the things that once defined our lives are no longer held against us...we are free. What a relief! What an amazing and gracious God we serve.

And now that we understand our former way of life to be idolatrous, we need also to understand that Christ has called us to live differently. All the sinful behavior that once ruled our lives, now we ***must put them all away***.

But what does this mean exactly? Paul is not telling us to rid ourselves of sex in general but to repent and turn away from ***sexual immorality***. Sex is not the problem; it is actually a gift from God to be enjoyed within the God established boundary of marriage. The problem is when we take God's gift and we drag it outside the boundaries of what He created it for and then it becomes sinful and idolatrous and wrath inducing.

The thing we must understand about our past is that all of it was fueled by our love for self. The prime motive for our past life of sin was the self-worship in our hearts. So part of what Christ does in our lives is He comes and exposes that idolatry. He shows us that we had placed ourselves on the throne and that our desires had become the object of our worship. He shows us that we had taken the gifts of God and corrupted them for our own glory.

But now, He is calling us to live a new life. He is calling us to line our lives up with the way God has created us to live. He wants us to enjoy God's good gifts in the way God intended and to repent of the ways that we had corrupted those gifts. But there are also some things that He wants us to put aside altogether.

<sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

Like the previous list this one also follows a progression from root to fruit, only this one works in the opposite direction. He starts with the motive, the root of the problem, and he works to the action, the fruit of our sin.

**Anger** is the root problem and it is described as the smoldering wick. All that is needed to move us from Anger to hateful speech is for the right set of circumstances to fan our anger into full flame. When someone provokes us they don't cause us to be angry, they are simply revealing the anger that is already present. Those of us who struggle with anger all the time, we have a secret in common with the Incredible Hulk and that secret is that we are always angry. All we need is the right set of circumstances to blow on us and ignite what is already smoldering in our hearts.

**Anger** is the smoldering wick but taking the next step Paul mentions are **rage and malice**. These refer to the full-blown fire set ablaze. And when they reach full blaze they burst out of us as **slander** and **hateful speech**. When this sin comes to the point of action it is being directed at the people around us.

The first list exposed the **root of idolatry, sin against God**; this list exposes the **root of anger, sin against man**. When the sin in our hearts burst out it effects our vertical relationship to God and our horizontal relationships to others.

But through Jesus our vertical relationship to God has been restored and our horizontal relationships with others can be put right as well. ***Our past no longer defines us.***

### III. The Christian's Mind (v. 9-10)

9 ...you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self,

**Put off the old and put on the new.** That sounds simple enough. It's like changing clothes. You take off the old torn up jeans that fit so comfortably you don't want to get rid of them and you put on the new jeans that Christ has given you to walk in. Sounds simple right. But it's the next part of the verse that is really going to rub some of us the wrong way.

...which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

You know what this verse means? It means that our growth in Christ is going to take time.

There are some interesting studies being done in our culture right now and most of us will ignore them. These studies have to do with the effects of mobile computing devices on our brains. The little phones that we carry in our pockets and hold in front of our faces all day are altering our brain chemistry. They are causing us to be impatient and irritable all the time. They are also destroying interpersonal communication and having a terrible impact on our relationships.

But the reason I am bring this up has to do with the fact that now, more than ever before we expect things to happen instantly. One of the negative effects of handheld mobile computing is that we can't stand to wait for anything. We want it now. We want things to happen now. We want things to change now and when they don't we just abandon the pursuit. And this is going to pose a problem for us as Christians because growth in godliness doesn't happen in an instant.

Seeking the Kingdom of God and growing as a Christian cannot be downloaded on the App Store or Google Play. This is going to happen over time as our minds are being ***renewed in knowledge after the image of our creator***. What does this mean? It means that you and I are going to grow in Christian faithfulness as we grow in our knowledge of God and His Word.

William Hendriksen describes the Christian life in this way:

“When a man is led through the waters of salvation, these are ankle deep at first, but as he progresses, they become knee deep, then reach to the waist, and are finally impassable except by swimming.”<sup>2</sup>

To grow we are going to have to learn to swim in the deep end, to let God’s Word shape our understanding and to guide our lives.

**Romans 12:1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by *the renewal of your mind*, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Jesus wants us to be sanctified in the truth of God’s Word. Peter tells us that to grow up in the faith we are going to need the nourishment that comes from the pure milk of the Word of God. The Bible is the food that fuels our growth as Christians. We are called to read, study, sing, pray, hear and share God’s Word, but we aren’t called to do this alone.

#### **IV. The Christian’s Family/Community (v. 11)**

<sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

The Christian life isn’t one that we live in a vacuum, but one that we share with our new brothers and sisters. And notice that those brothers and sisters are not going to be just like us. We may not have many things in common but we have Christ in common and He is enough.

The gospel breaks down every social barrier that exists. Christ restores our relationship to God and He restores our relationship to humanity. In fact, Jesus and His gospel have given rise to a new humanity that is no longer divided on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, wealth, political class, or social standing.

In the church, the rich man and the slave sit at the same table. The Jew eats with the Gentile. People from once warring nations now sit around the Word and pray together in peace. The gospel brings peace because the gospel unites our hearts to the same person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have all been set free by the same man and therefore our allegiance is no longer tied to what once defined us but it is defined by our redeemer. Do differences still exist between us? Yes, but those differences no longer define us, our unity in Christ now defines us.

Our differences once caused us to have little concern for the life of others, but now our common faith in Christ means that I have a great concern for the life of my brother. When I show no concern for my African American brothers I am ignoring Christ and the ones He died to save. When we show no concern for the poor among us we are ignoring Jesus and the example that he gave to us. Our old prejudices must die along with our old self and in its place our new self must learn to embrace the new Christian Community that we have been born into.

#### **Conclusion...**

In closing, I want us to think back to how this whole sermon began by looking at the beginning of time and how it all went wrong. When Adam and Eve sinned against God they plunged all of

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<sup>2</sup> Hendrickson, William *New Testament Commentary on Colossians* (Baker) pg. 150

humanity into rebellion. The result was that we were separated from God because of sin. God's judgment is a reality now because of our sin. Our hearts are corrupted and idolatrous because of sin. Our relationship to one another was also corrupted.

War fills human history. Anger and hatred fuel the way we treat one another. Our chief concern is to think only of ourselves and not to care for others.

But Christ came to heal that brokenness and bring us back together again. He heals our relationship with the Father by sacrificing Himself to pay our ransom. He gives us a new heart and sets us free from the controlling influence of self-worship. He then brings men and women from every tribe, tongue and nation to the same table and gives us bread and wine to drink.

Sin brought chaos into the world but Jesus has come to bring peace. ***Christ is all, and in all.***