

Colossians 3:5-11 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.

## Colossians 3:5-11 | Put to Death what is Earthly

The experience of this new life is not put off until we are finally raised, but by the mercy of Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit it stretches back to the present so that we are able to participate in this new creation, this covenant people, this new mode of being put to death and raised with Christ now. Paul explains this concept this week, not just as something that passively happens to us but also as something in which we actively participate.

Now this is thrilling but also makes sense because the heart of our restoration to God is the renewal of a broken relationship by God's love. The ways of participating in this renewed relationship are present and practical. As we participate in Christ's story in our lives in this renewed covenant relationship we embody the pattern of what he has accomplished for us on the cross. We embody Christ's death, by putting to death the deeds of our flesh. And we embody Christ's resurrection by putting on his qualities. Today Paul shows us this same Gospel story the one that he has been describing since the beginning of the letter, the same gospel which has taken root among the Colossians and around the whole world is bearing fruit and increasing, but this time he tells that story as we participate in it in our own lives. This week we look at participating in Christ's death, next week we look at participating in his resurrection.

There are two lists in this passage, one which has to do with our own hearts, and the other has to do with the culture that we create as his church.

### 1. Personal Mortification

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

This might be better translated to "put to death your members that are on the earth." Now that is a strange phrase, but Paul consistently talks about our sin being located in our members, that is the parts of ourselves that interact with the world, our hands our mouths, and he extends this metaphor to include parts of our minds. Now this way of thinking is foreign to our self-conceptions now, as we often think of our hands as being separate from our minds and intentions. But Paul had a more profound insight, he understood that our

sinfulness corrupts all parts of ourselves and we participate in it out of practice and habit like a sort of muscle memory.

This idea of a deep mind body connection is being restored in modern thought, many of you have read the book *The Body Keeps the Score*. It is a book that Paul wouldn't have needed because he understood that we are whole people, and therefore the practices that we embrace also form us. Our chest tightens because we are fearful and we become fearful because our chest tightens. Therefore Paul is calling your attention to actions that you do and saying to put to death those which enflame your flesh.

But you may remember last week when we were exploring the paragraph above this one Paul says,

Colossians 3:3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

This is no contradiction. It is the very principle I previously explained. That what is true of us in principle because of what Christ has accomplished, we are now by his Spirit able to participate in. If we had not died with Christ, we would have no hope of being able to put to death our flesh. Therefore this same principle remains, we are not putting to death to merit our salvation but only because we have been saved are we able to put to death the flesh. Now let us look closely at this first list.

Colossians 3:5b sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

The list is structured in an inward march from sexual immorality to the heart that drives it. The purpose of this shape is that Paul is encouraging us to cut off the very stream which drives our wickedness. It is so important to have words for our sins because they are particular and we are particular things that participate in them. Paul gives us words to be killing our flesh. A taxonomy of sin so we might aim small and miss small.

It begins with **Sexual Immorality**: Now it is not that this is the worst of all possible sins but for Paul it is often used as the archetypal sin because in sexual immorality we are relationally misusing ourselves. We are denying the relationship structure that Christ has called us to. The word here for sexual immorality refers to any sex outside of marriage. This includes pornography, adultery, homosexuality, hooking up, sex while dating or engaged. Each of these are a forging with your members a denial of the relational constraints Christ has built into the world.

These actions result in and flow from an **impurity**. Impurity is a reference to the contaminating effects sexual immorality has on us. It is a misdirected mind and then actions that contaminate us. And we know this because we know that pornography for

example captures our minds and distorts them to make them more impure the more we consume.

**Passion and Evil Desire:** These are like the active and passive version of the same thing. Our passions become that which we pursue and cultivate, and suddenly we find ourselves expending great energy to consume and cultivate impurity. Passively this becomes a disposition of evil desire. I heard a great definition of addiction. Addiction is a steady narrowing of that which brings you pleasure in life. Evil desires do the same thing. We only are disposed towards things that bring us death, rather than the breadth of life that God has given us.

**Covetousness which is Idolatry:** Paul ends this list where the ten commandments ends, because this is the heart of the matter. We desire things just for ourselves. All of these things fall under this category of selfishness that desires not to worship the true God but to manipulate idols into giving us what we want. You've "uncreated" yourself and therefore denied your position with your creator. It's a devolution beneath your true humanity.

Colossians 3:6-7 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.

Paul places this clear warning against these modes of being. They are the exigencies which require the wrathful response of a holy God. Now Paul uses this ambiguous term saying "the wrath of God is coming." It is his way of saying that God's wrath is already present in the world against such behavior and it is coming at his final judgment in which these behaviors are condemned. Part of the wrath of God against sin is the inherent results of sin itself. Your disordered relationships, unfulfilled life, the death and disorder. But God's wrath will come in its final form at the judgment at the end of the age and no evil deed will go unpunished. Either in Christ, or in your own person by eternal damnation.

Paul knows that life is relatable.

## 2. *Communal Mortification*

Colossians 3:8-9 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,

This list switches from the internal disposition of one's own heart to the disordered community which forms around such disordered hearts. So he calls us to put them all away:

**Anger & Wrath:** This is referring to a settled disposition of the heart which is like a roaring furnace seeking to devour what comes near. Our hearts ought to be able to have

anger pulled out of them, we should care, but we should not be the source of anger. Notice what makes you angry, the source often comes from you and your own disordered desires. This must be put away.

**Malice:** is the settled intention of the mind towards evil. You are creative and considerate in your calculating evil for your neighbor.

**Slander & Obscene Talk:** This is our gossip, and backbiting. It is the intended destructive communication about and to others. These are the barbs you throw, and the curses you make about others.

**Do not lie to one another:** We are a city on a hill, a city of truth. Tell one another the truth! What hope do we have if the church becomes a community of deception!

### 3. Seeing by the Marker of Christ

Colossians 3:9b-10 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.

You have to see that in Christ those modes of being are not me anymore. That was the old self, but that has been put away, and I am being renewed after the image of my creator. This is a type of renewal which takes place in knowledge. That means it takes place in our knowing of Christ. He is our pattern, he is our life, he is our death and resurrection. Our old nature decays unto death our new nature grows like a plant and multiplies. We are being renewed in knowledge after Christ.

As we put off these old ways, we are forming a new type of person and we are participating in a new type of community which is being built up by Christ. Of that new community Paul says this:

Colossians 3:11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

The greek had conquered the world in Alexander and when conquered by Rome they only conquered Rome culturally as well. But the Jew knew the one true God and had his promises over against the Greek. The circumcised was in the community of God the uncircumcised was not. The Barbarian is anyone outside the empire and the Scythian is the worst most immoral of all the barbarians. And right down the middle of it all ran the dividing line of slave and free. But none of these count for anything to God. But only Christ. Christ is the one who unites us. Christ is the deciding factor of all human relationships. It is all and only Christ.