

Be Killing What Does Not Belong in Christ (Or What Does Not Belong in Christ Will Be Killing You)

Colossians 3:5–10

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Our minds and our hearts, as believers, are to be set on things above, where Christ is, because Christ is in us. ***Christ is in you!*** This is the hope of glory! What we look like, what we do, what we think, what we pursue, what we love must naturally look like Christ, whose image is being formed and restored in us. We have a new nature, as we saw in Colossians 2. The old nature is cut off. If Christ is in us, we act like Christ, think like Christ — we have the mind of Christ — we pursue his kingdom, the things above... we love whom he loves and what he loves because Christ is *right now* in us, and we in him.

There are ethical implications based on this relationship — practical things we are to do if Christ is in us. What is not consistent with his character gotta get canceled. Citizens of the domain darkness engage in darkness because they are citizens of darkness. It's their birthright. Conversely, citizens of Kingdom of the Beloved Son engage in Kingdom things -- not in order to become Kingdom citizens, but because they are Kingdom citizens. They have been adopted into the King's family.

Is there anyone who would not agree that is the way things should be?

That makes sense, pastor! I see that in the Scripture. I absolutely agree that all of that should be true of me, because I am in Christ through grace alone by faith alone. But I gotta tell ya, even though I stand in Christ, I don't always look like him. Today we train to battle for the holiness and the image of our Savior.

PRAY

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Practices of Purity: Conforming to the Image of Christ

There are practical, down-to-earth steps that David Atkins is to take to escape from *of-the-earth* sins. Things above, things of heaven, things of Christ's kingdom, ultimate things — these are to govern and guide my thinking and my affections — my loves... not things that are rooted in this passing, sin-cursed world.

There are **2 primary commands** that lead off **2 lists** of root sins. The first command is in **v. 5** — **put to death**... followed by a list of sexual sins. The second is in **v. 8** — **put them all away**; put off, get rid of, thoroughly clean out... and then another list of sins of the heart. Let's look at the commands first, and then the two lists of sins.

v. 5 — put to death, or kill — it is one word in Greek, and it simply and plainly means **make dead**.

We are to kill sin; exterminate it. End its life. Sin mars the image of Christ; therefore if we are in Christ, we cannot continue to live in sin. Paul allows for only 2 realities: We are either dead in sin, or we are putting sin to death. There is no category where we are alive to God in Christ and alive to sin. If we are alive in Christ, we are reckoning the members of bodies dead to sin.

Some observations about the command to kill sin:

1. We are in the ongoing process of killing sin. Sanctification is a process, not a finished work.

There is killing to be done. Killing will continue to need to be done. We are ultimately freed from our battle with sin, but not on this side of heaven. Don't be surprised at this. It is a false expectation that a certain age or place will secure freedom from temptation. That is simply not true. We must make war on sin until the last breath escapes our lungs. Expect it. Pray for help. And be faithful in the fight. Learn to kill sin now; it will help you fight better then. We learn and grow stronger in the faith and in wisdom. We come under increasing control of the Spirit and increase in knowledge of Scripture. Here we are freed from the penalty of sin, and the power of sin. Freedom from the presence of sin is in the New Creation. Don't be surprised; don't be discouraged. Your King will equip you and help you.

2. Sin is to trigger an immediate death sentence. We are tempted to sin from within — that is, our own sinful hearts; and we are tempted to sin externally — our enemy schemes and tempts us to sin. Whether we are tempted by internal lusts or external charms, **any presentation of sin in our life is to trigger the same immediate response: Kill it.**

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3. To kill, to make something dead, is an aggressive act. It is not passive. The Apostle is not allowing us to be pacifists. We are to act to kill sin the instant it appears. We don't wait around and see what happens. As fast as Joseph fled Potiphar's wife, we are to instantly pull the trigger to kill sin.

4. We are to recognize sin as a deadly threat. We are to see past any promise of delight, or pleasure, or payoff and treat it as a soul-killing enemy. Sin never shows up looking like a murderer. Sin masks its deadly deformity by promising life — the opposite of what it produces.

The 9/11 attackers did not show up at airports on that Tuesday morning presenting themselves as terrorists. They were liars who discreetly blended into the everyday warp and woof of American life. That is what sin does — it presents itself as harmless, as normal. Before 9/11 we not perceive or recognize a domestic threat from middle eastern terrorists. We do now. We are likewise to understand sin's deadly end.

We are to have our minds shaped by the framework of seeking things above so that we recognize earthly sin. If sin ever looked like a murderer, we would not embrace it. This is why we pursue the things of Christ, why we love the enduring Kingdom of God and not transient, decaying things. If we will seek him, and set our minds on him in this way, we will recognize sin as a threat, regardless of how it presents itself or what costume it wears. To spot deception we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds, which comes through his word. Hence,

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. — Psalm 119:9

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. — Psalm 119:11

The Scripture reveals Holy God, his character, his ways, and his purposes. When we orient our minds and affections to these things, we are able to see what is not consistent with God or his character or Kingdom.

If you are not being transformed by the renewing of your mind according to his word, I have no idea how you will ever recognize sin by any true standard. You will be utterly unprepared and defenseless to fend off the murderous assault of sin against your soul, and you probably won't even recognize that you are in the process of being killed by sin. That is the nature of a darkened mind.

Are you oriented to word of God? Are you taking heed according to his word? Is God's word shaping the framework of your mind and your affections? If not, it is likely that you are tolerating terrorists in

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your life and you are not even aware of them. Sin will not treat you kindly, whether you recognize it or not. Be transformed by God's word and let him shine the light of Christ, the light of holiness, into your life so that you recognize sin's deadly threat.

5. We are not to trim sin. We are not to manage it — which cannot be done. We are to kill it. It is a decisive act. Our assignment is not to reduce sin, or get an upper hand on it. We must not coddle any it. Killing sin is an act of life and death. We are prone to be ready to shoot to kill sin in the lives of others. But the sins we have developed a taste for — what Jerry Bridges calls “refined sins” — we politely tame and train pet sins, falsely believing we can manage them. Christians, kill all sin, not just the ones that don't scratch your itch. John Owen: *Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.* What sin do you imagine you are managing? You are not managing it; it is killing you. Kill it, lest you perish.

Now, the second verb: v. 8 — Put them away, put off, as something unclean or filthy.

NIV translates the verb, *rid yourself*. It is a thorough cleaning that leaves no trace of filth. It is not protective of favored sins. It is a purge without partiality for pet sins.

Let's say you owned a mansion. At some point you go on vacation and spend 2 months on your yacht in Bermuda. When you return home, you discover a group of meth-making drug dealers have moved in your house and set up shop. When you get home you manage to throw them all out in the yard. Once the police have arrested them, you go inside your lovely mansion and notice all the pots they cooked meth in, all the boxes of chemicals, all the filth, all the smelly things they used... What do you do with that stuff? You clean it out completely. You rid yourself of it. You scrub the place. You don't live in there with the remnants of that stuff! This is a picture of the thorough cleaning of all remnants and residue of sin and sinful practices. Alcoholics who escape the clutches of alcoholism do not allow alcohol to have a place in their homes. They clean out all the stashes, all the bottles... every unclean thing goes. They plan not to be able to fail. They don't think, “I won the battle today, so I have nothing to worry about tomorrow.” Sin's remnants are sanitized and scrubbed so as to avoid future infection. In **Romans 13:14**, Paul put it like this: **But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.** Clean it out. Root it out. Rid yourself. Put it all away. Don't leave anything under the mattress, or hidden in a crevice of your heart. Cut it out as thoroughly as though it was a malignant tumor growing in your brain. What do you need to do today, right now, to rid yourself of what will produce death if you don't put it away? Deal with it aggressively and live!

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Now let's look at the lists of sins that **do not** reflect the reality of being in Christ, that are not compatible with Christ in you. The first list is in v. 5:

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

4 Observations on the First List, in v. 5:

1. These are root sins of pride, lust, and sexual immorality. They are not fruit sins that can be tasted, touched, or handled... You remember that little instruction from the end **Chapter 2**? Don't deny certain things in an effort to throttle back or control sinful lusts. Don't try a moralistic sing-song, "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." Those things appear to do some good, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

This list is dealing with sinful roots in the heart that produce rotten fruit in the life. The battle for Christlikeness, the battle for holiness will not be won outward behaviors, but in inward heart change.

2. Sexual sin has been around a long, long time. It is true that we swim and live in a sexual cesspool. But the wickedness we currently see is not new. In God's good design, we are created as sexual beings. But when sin entered it showed up in our private parts first. The shame of sin was felt, if you will, in their nakedness. We are hardwired by God with a sexual psyche, but it was warped badly in the fall. Though we think it's as bad as its ever been, that's simply not the case. It is bad, but its been bad before. We are equipped to flee sexually immorality and to live God-honoring lives of sexual purity that glorify him, reflect his character, and display his good design. But all departs from God's design are to be turned from and put to death. They cannot be tolerated in the life of one in Christ.

3. Some good news: Sexual sin is not beyond the reach of the cross. You are not chained in sexual sin. The fact that the Apostle tells us to put it to death means that it can be put to death. And it must be. The longer you remain in sexual sin, the deeper the contours it cuts in your heart and mind, This makes the battle harder and multiplies brokenness and pain in your life. But Christ died for sexual sinners. He paid the price for sexual sin. The hostility that sexual sin produced between you and God was ended at the cross for those who come to Christ in faith and repentance. Jesus reconciled us to God, making peace by the blood of his cross.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 — Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who

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practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ 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.

If you are in Christ, put to death what is not worthy of Christ, who is in you. Fight! Kill sin!

4. Covetousness is a massive root in all sexual sin. Note the inclusion of covetousness with sexual sin. It is not an oddball in the list; it is main taproot of sexual sin. Covetousness comes from pride that says everything — everything, including other people, and their bodies, is made for my personal pleasure and entertainment. Read: Porn. Coveting in regards to sexual sin disconnects a person's body from the reality that they are image bearers of God and treats them as sub-human, soul-less creatures that are to serve my appetites as though I was god. Do not toy with porn and lustful thoughts. They are cyanide to your soul, and provoke God to righteous judgment and wrath. Bring your sexual sin and brokenness to the cross of Christ, where the wrath of God was satisfied, where forgiveness of sins is brokered, and where new life is found in his death burial and resurrection.

Now the second list in v. 8–9 — **But now you must put them all away: anger wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, see that you have put off the old self with its practices.**

This list deals with expressions of anger and abusive speech. If anger seems like a significantly lesser issue than sexual sin, then we will do well to be reminded of the root of anger. It's far more serious than losing your temper. You probably come close to having it memorized, but let's look quickly at the connection Jesus makes regarding anger in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:21–22 — ²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Sin is subtle and deceptive. We are prone to misjudge its seriousness, and worse, in our dullness we are blind to it apart from the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the word of God. In the Great Sermon Jesus exposes anger for what it is: It is an expression of a murderous heart. We may resist that characterization, but either Jesus is correct and truthful, or he's not.

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Why must we aggressively and thoroughly put off anger? Because anger is an assault on the very life of one who is its target. That's what Jesus says.

- When we allow and engage sinful expressions of anger and wrath, we assault the very life of an image bearer of God.
- When we seek to end someone's life, even through ungodly anger, we are putting ourselves in the place of God, who is the author of life, not us.
- When we give place to wrath against someone else, we assume we are even more holy and righteous than God himself, whose wrath was assuaged on the cross by Christ.
- When we slander someone, we are seeking to destroy one for whom Christ died.

How can any of these things be true for one in Christ? We must thoroughly rid ourselves of these things — uproot them, and clean them out, root and branch, until only the image of Christ remains. Obscene talk that betrays the beauty and purity of Christ must be cleaned out. There must be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking; no locker room talk, nothing base. Christ in you would talk like this. Instead let thanksgiving flow from your mouth, as Ephesians 5 commands.

Lying tops off that unholy stew. None of that reflects Christ. None of that flows out of heart that is pursuing the things of God. None of that demonstrates a mind set on things above where Christ is. All of those suggest there is no change available in Christ, and therefore there is no hope in Christ. And that is not true. Christ is the supreme Lord, the sanctifying Savior. Therefore, as a truthful and accurate reflection of Christ, all of that old man, old nature stuff is to put off in its entirety. We have a new self in Christ to put on, and we will examine that next Sunday, Lord willing.

If the Holy Spirit has used the word of God to expose some sin that is not true of the character of Christ, if there is some sin you have not been killing, today is the day of salvation. Today is the day of favor. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. God's love is demonstrated for us, not in his accepting some moral self-improvement we would offer... there is nothing we can offer. God's love is demonstrated in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for the ungodly, in order to reconcile them to God, and to take up residence in them to make them holy and accepted. It is true, your sin is great and damning. But Christ saves from sin. As the author of *Amazing Grace* once wrote: I am a great sinner; but Christ is a great Savior. Turn to Christ from sin, and put on new life in Christ.