

Clothed with Compassion

Put to Death

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.” – Colossians 3:5-6

I'll be sharing a devotion today on this cheerful little passage from Colossians. It's probably a favorite memory verse, so I bet many of you know it by heart. Jokes aside, Paul, our author of Colossians, also wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that, *“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* It is important that we face all of Scripture, and cling to the encouraging passages, the passages that remind us of our salvation, and the passages, like this one, which have challenging words but attempt to steer us from calamity.

Hang with me here, because I'm about to talk about a dream I know that God used to get my attention. This is not a way I rely on for guidance from God, and my denomination does not rely on dreams and visions – but, they do appear in the Bible, so we know they can be good. And, if something is good, lines up with Scripture, it may be of God, then we need to pay attention. Just before college, I really became serious about my faith. I would say that I went from being a believer in God to a disciple of Jesus, but there were many aspects of the old self that were still around. I was excited about my faith, but I was not ready to let go of the earthly nature. One night in college, I had a dream that I was being held back from playing in a game by the coach, that I had to get rid of some things before I could play, and the details of the dream were so vivid and real, that I woke up and knew the Lord was trying to tell me to deal with some of 'old self' that was still around. I knew God was trying to show me what Paul is trying to help the Colossians see – sin is dangerous, his letter is not some arbitrary list of rules from God. It's more like guardrails that keep us on a good and healthy road, and once we commit to Christ, we need to start living 'the new self' and let the earthly nature of the old self go.

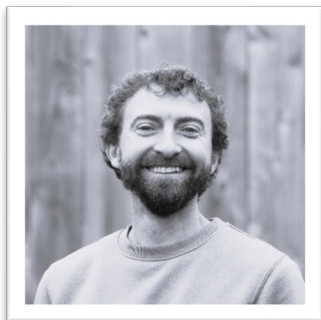
Paul telling the church at Colossae to 'put to death' something of themselves is a strong command. It sounds painful, messy, challenging. Yet this language of 'death' and 'earthly nature' relates back to verse 3, when Paul reminds the readers 'you have died.' That's the reality of the life change that takes place when we come to Christ. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come”* – 2 Corinthians 5:17. Paul uses this reference of new creation and new self across many letters (Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 4:23-24, Romans 7:6). I think we like the idea of being a new creation, but I'm not sure we are as enthusiastic about identifying and putting to death things of our earthly nature. Maybe we can still be a new creation and just hide these things in the basement out of sight? Unfortunately, when things like this remain alive but are kept hidden, they thrive.

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So, how do we identify what is earthly in nature, like the items on this list? Sin is tricky because it is often a twist on something that is good. Sexual immorality makes Paul's list here with good reason, but sex itself is not a sin but a gift, in the proper context. Greed makes Paul's list here. Wealth itself is not a bad thing, but did we accomplish this by good fortune, hard work, God's blessing – or greed. Pride is another challenge - it can be hard to discern when someone is a good leader and confident in who they are – or if they have strayed into pride. From the outside, it can be hard to tell, and it's very dangerous to try to guess the motives of others. But Paul is not asking us to judge others here – he is asking us to take a good look at ourselves. God knows the heart and the motives, and I believe, through Scripture and the Holy Spirit, we can allow God to reveal to us the aspects of our nature that are the old self. The good news is, that we are a new creation - saved by grace, in Christ, and we can walk forward in that confidence.

- 1. Reflect back on when you first gave your life to Christ. What has changed for the better? What are some of the first things of the old self that you left behind?**
- 2. Do you have people in your life that spur you into greater discipleship in Christ? Would you describe them as examples for you, or people who can speak truth into your life? (This is not easy FYI, but it's worth it!)**
- 3. How do you reconcile a God of grace with a God that is also just? (We didn't have much opportunity to engage in verse 6, but I encourage you to not turn away from the challenging things of God. I do believe, the more you seek and understand God, the more you will realize He loves you, and I believe you will continue to love him back.) Here are some verses for reference: Romans 5:12, Romans 3:23, John 3:3, John 3:36, Ephesians 2:8-9.**



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