

September 28, 2008

Colossians 3:5-7

Alright good morning –I'm glad you are here today. Though Nicole and I enjoyed being on vacation last week, it is hard not to be with you on Sunday mornings. So grab your Bibles and let's go back to our study of Colossians today. We are in Colossians chapter 3. This morning we will be looking at verses 5 through 7.

When you get there, notice with me that right in the first half of verse 5 there is a “therefore” – which means what Paul is saying or going to say is predicated on what he just said. So we have to go back and you should always go back to get the context. So we'll begin back in verse 1 and come forward to verse 7.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Just real fast remember that Paul is telling us that we have risen, victorious, eternal life right now. Eternal life doesn't start when you die physically – it starts when you die to yourself in salvation and receive Christ's life in you. That's what we have – that is our current reality – our current position before God. Which means we live in a paradox. We are in the process of becoming what we already are. It is what Paul talked about in Philippians 2:12 when he said continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. We saw one of the first ways we do that is by setting our minds our hearts on the things of heaven – on Jesus, his plans, his purposes, his power, his promises. Next Paul is fixing to make that paradox even more practical. Keep reading.

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. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

Let me tell you two things right quick – one just so you know, there is so much we need to hear from God in this passage that I cut out a lot of the fluff & funny this morning on purpose so stick with me as we go through it and secondly, don't freak out about the size of the message map – I just wanted you to have as much of the notes as possible so that you can take it home to digest with Jesus this week. Ok – let's jump in.

The NIV says in verse 5 – **put to death**. The Greek word behind that means literally to “make dead” – **to KILL** – it is very strong in its meaning. It suggests that **we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes, but that we are to wipe them out**, to completely exterminate the old way of life.

In fact if you are using an older translation, it may indicate that you are to kill the members of your earthly body. That is a figure of speech called metonymy. When he speaks of killing bodily parts or members, he is actually referring to the sins associated with those members. But the force here is that of an action to be taken decisively and with a sense of urgency. It is not an option, it is a command. This is the picture of a guy who is working at a machine and gets his fingers caught between the rollers or stuck in the belting. In another minute he will be flattened into a shapeless bloody mass. So he grabs an axe lying nearby and with his own arm he hacks off his own hand at the wrist. It is not easy nor is it pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death. Right off the bat I want us to wake up to the seriousness & severity of what God is saying here.

What Paul is talking about in these verses is what John MacArthur calls spiritual suicide. **Living the risen life that we have in Christ involves the process of killing the old life in a PRACTICAL way**. Positionally it is a done deal by the power & grace of God in Jesus Christ. But that has to work

itself out in an every day kind of living. How do you do that? We have to start killing some things in our lives. It is what Jesus said in Luke 9:23 when he said if anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily. Daily in the life of a Christian is an exercise in dying. Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature. God is calling for the elimination of everything from your life and my life that is against God.

And then he gives us some sample sins. This is a sin sampler – very specific – these have got to die. Look at what he says: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” These are all things we have to kill – they are personal, they are passion sins, they are related to feelings, in fact they are all tied to a perverted understanding of love. But notice the sequence here. We will look at them individually in a second, but first you have an evil action – sexual immorality. That evil action happens because of impurity which is basically an unholy affection. That unholy affection comes from a perverted passion at the heart which is what lust and evil desires mean. That all comes out of the core of greed or covetousness; wanting what is forbidden which is idolatry because whenever you say “I want what I want no matter what God says” you are no longer worshipping God, you are worshipping yourself, right? So he starts with the action and goes all the way back to the heart to the source of it. And there is a reason for that we’ll see in a minute, but let’s look real quickly at what these mean.

First of all **sexual immorality**. Comes from the word “pornea” in the Greek which where we get our word “pornography” and it basically **refers to any unlawful sexual encounter**. This goes beyond just a man & a woman in a relationship, it covers any kind of forbidden sexual act and we could spend weeks and weeks looking at this all through Scripture. We’ll see in a minute that Paul gives us 2 reasons in these verses and it is has already been tied to our salvation in Jesus Christ and our heart for him in verses 1-4 and there are so many other explanations, warnings, & reasons all through the Bible, but we’d end up back here knowing that any evil in the realm of sex is to be killed – to be put to death. God forbids **any sexual activity outside of MARRIAGE**.

Those immoral sexual actions spring from **impurity**, the second term. It means **evil thoughts. Filthy intentions. It is the evil thought BEHIND the evil deed**. In fact it is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew chapter 5:28 when he says “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Notice that Jesus does not say the looking is committing adultery. This is important. The looking simply verifies that your heart is guilty just like someone who has committed adultery. By the time you look lustfully – by the time you look with the intent – by the time you look with those impure thoughts – you have already become guilty in your heart. The sin of the heart surfaces in the looking and that sin, left unchecked will move towards more and more sin.

Folks just in these first two steps in the sin sampler, you see real fast that **you control your THOUGHTS, then you will control your body. You control your mind and you can control your emotions**. That’s why Paul says in Romans 12 that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Evil thoughts produce sin just as righteous thoughts produce righteous deeds. That’s why Philippians 4:8 says if anything is excellent or praise worthy, think on such things. Where you focus your thoughts will determine what you do with your body. So you have to expect evil deeds in a society that is dominated by impure thinking.

Next where does impurity come from? Paul uses two words here: **lust and evil desires**. It is very hard to distinguish between these two terms – they may have had some shade of meaning difference to the Greek, but today the best explanation of a difference would be that they are **two different levels of passion in the HEART** – one being more latent and the other more of a fired up kind of thing. So what we have here is this latent sexual desire that becomes an activated or passionate sexual desire that creates evil thoughts that leads to evil deeds. But when you back to the bottom of it – the last term Paul uses – is **greed** – which means **covetousness**. The word itself means to have more but it means more than that – it means **to want what isn’t yours to have – to want the**

FORBIDDEN thing. James says the same thing if you'll think back to our study of James chapter 4 when he says "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight." And Paul says when you get down to it, what that basically is is **idolatry**.

You want a simple definition of sin? Here it is, in your life as you live, you either worship God or you worship yourself. If you truly worship God as God then you say, "God, what pleases you?" God says "This pleases me." You say "Yes God. That's what I'll do." If you don't, you say "Self, what pleases you?" Self says "I want that." You say "But God says no and that's forbidden, that's less than best." But self says, "I don't care. I want that." And you bow at the shrine of self. And out of that deep seated greed – that deep seated covetousness is generated the evil desire that flames itself into an evil thought that becomes an evil deed.

Folks – listen to me – Paul is driving us to the fact that if you are going to kill – **if you're going to put to death – you don't just whack the branches, you got to get to the root which is setting YOURSELF up as someone to be worshipped over God.** And that is idolatry – the most heinous sin – when God said you shall have no other gods before me, he included you and me in those no other gods.

So Paul says "put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." **Why?** He gives us two reasons. First he says that because of these the wrath of God is coming. Folks, **wrath is God's constant, invariable reaction to SIN.** Unbelievers will experience the full force of God's wrath for eternity. In Romans 2:5 says that if you are an unbeliever, "you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed." And since the sins we just looked at typify sin in general – **because these sins are the reason God's wrath is coming, BELIEVER should have no part in them.**

See Paul is not warning us that if we commit these sins, we will feel the furious wrath of God. Rather he is saying that those who are Christ's – those who we saw in verse 1-4 have died and been raised in Christ – those for whom Christ is their life – those who love Him and serve His glory would certainly not want to participate in those kinds of behaviors and characteristics of those who will feel God's eternal wrath. But understand as well, that although believers have been delivered from God's eternal wrath, this still serves as a warning in two ways. First, a small part of God's wrath is set up in God's truth. **When God makes something forbidden – when God says something is less than best – it is – and he says so for a reason. And when we choose to live against that, we will suffer the CONSEQUENCES.**

Galatians 6:7-9: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

But secondly, we're reminded as well that those who have been delivered from God's wrath – **those He loves are subject to God's chastening – his DISCIPLINE.** Hebrews 12:5-6 tells us God disciplines those he loves. God will react against sin. The unbeliever will experience His eternal wrath and the believer His loving chastening – either way, all who pursue sin like this will suffer the consequences.

The second reason Paul gives us here in Colossians for putting to death these sins is because they belong to our old life. He says "you used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." **They are part of your used-to-be, not of your NOW.** That's the old you. I mean you have been made rich, why would you want to return to the poverty and wallow in the slime? I guess that's something we ought to think about. I've been delivered from the dominance of sin. It's pretty stupid to go around and fool with it, isn't it? Pretty stupid. When I go back and fool around with it, the consequences are tragic. So Paul says in Galatians 5:1, it is for freedom you have been set free, so do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

- Did you know that more than 70% of men from 18-34 visit a pornographic website in a typical month?
- A 1996 Promise Keepers survey at one of their stadium events revealed that over 50% of the men in attendance were involved with pornography within one week of attending the event.
- 57% of pastors say that addiction to pornography is the most sexually damaging issue to their congregation.
- 47% of families said pornography is a problem in their home.
- The internet was a significant factor in 2 out of 3 divorces in 2003.
- The largest consumer of internet porn? The 12-17 year old age group.
- Another survey showed that 59% of married Christian men regularly fantasize about sexual relations with someone other than their spouse.

Now those numbers are just that – numbers. But if there is any truth in those numbers about pornography and taking into consideration what we saw Paul say – what we say Jesus say today – then who here has not been guilty of looking on another person with lust? **The bottom line is that ALL of us have been guilty of sin in this sequence that Paul has lined out** – these sins that belong to our old life – these sins that bring about the wrath of God and have nothing to do with the life of someone who claims to love Jesus. Which means there ought to be a sense of conviction in our hearts today. But understand the purpose of that guilt – **the purpose of the conviction that we ought to be feeling is to drive us TO Jesus not away from Him.**

You ever seen a mommy or daddy blue jay push a baby blue jay out of the nest? At a certain point in their development, the parents literally push the kids out of the nest so that they fall to the pavement – kind of flutter down there. And then the parent birds began to swoop down and chirp loudly and just harass that baby bird on the pavement absolutely terrifying it until it tries to fly back up onto a branch. And they do that because if those babies stay on the ground, no matter how good or easy it might seem to them just to walk around and not bother to learn to fly, something would kill them. To stay on the ground meant death. So if the bird just stayed there, the parents would continue to swoop at it until it flew. That's exactly what conviction and guilt are supposed to do in us. That's why Paul is so extreme when he says to kill these sins – put them to death – they have no place in the life a believer. Our guilt in light of Jesus' promise to save & forgive should drive us to our only hope – to Christ who is our life – because to remain in these sins will destroy our lives and to live in them unrepentantly will lead us to hell.

Paul is no more extreme than Jesus himself who right after he equivocated lust and adultery then said in **Matthew 5:9**: “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Jesus is using purposeful hyperbole to emphasize that **we need to go to EXTREME measures in becoming practically who we are positionally in Jesus.**

I said earlier that when it comes to these sins, you don't just whack off the branches, you have to go to the root. Let me offer some application on both those fronts.

We've got to avoid pitfalls that lead to these sins and put up barriers to keep us from them. First of all – and this is aimed mainly at the men – **avoid a LACK of friendship with other men. Privacy means no accountability.** Privacy means deception and pride – thinking that you can really have a private life or that you don't need anyone. Create a barrier to that pitfall by **engaging spiritually with other men on a level of honesty that reflects that you understand there is no such thing as a private part of your life.** In fact, if there are areas of your life that no one knows about, you are

probably already involved somewhere in this string of sins. So get out of that pitfall. (2 Cor 5:10; James 5:16)

Second, all of us - **avoid the pitfall of spiritual droughts where you are not SEEKING the Lord at all.** You are in a deep pitfall if you are not seeking Jesus. Create a barrier against this pitfall by **reading the Word, submitting yourself to what you know is true, practicing confession, praying, regularly meeting with the body of Christ for worship.** Remember, even if you feel guilt in your life such that you don't think you can seek God – that guilt is meant to drive you to Jesus because He loves you. You could spend 5 hours this week surfing the web, playing video games, watching TV, cleaning house, working at home, doing errands or whatever and then try and justify yourself when God is convicting you by explaining that you just didn't have enough time to read your Bible & listen to Jesus. That's not going to fly. Connect with God at all costs. (Mark 12:30)

If you are married – number three – **do everything you can to avoid long times of a lack of emotional & physical connection with your SPOUSE.** Create a barrier against that pitfall by seeking to regularly and consistently connect with your spouse. (Matthew 19:6)

Fourth – **ask God what YOUR pitfalls are in these areas and how to set up barriers to avoid them.** Listen – Jesus said take extreme measures here. If the internet has you in its grasp, then get rid of the internet if that is what it takes. Stop making excuses that you need to check the weather or the stocks or whatever. Put to death that pitfall. If those catalogs and magazines that your wife gets in the mail are an issue – then tell your wife and get the catalogs stopped – you don't want them lying around the house. It's not worth it. Eliminate from your life as much as is possible anything that is likely to cause you to stumble. If it's a place, don't go there. If it's an image, turn away. If it's a song, don't listen. If it's a book, don't read it. If it's a liquid, don't drink it. If it's a person, part company. The sacrifice may be uncomfortable, even painful. It will most certainly be unpopular, but again "it is better to lose one of your members than your whole body to be thrown into hell."

Folks these sins that Paul lists enslave us. A friend of mine used the illustration of a tyrant king who summoned one of his subjects who was a blacksmith into his presence and ordered him to make a chain. The blacksmith went to work and forged a chain. When it was done he brought it to the tyrant and was ordered to go away and make it stronger and twice as long. So he did and he brought it back to the tyrant king who looked at the chain and then immediately commanded his servants to bind the blacksmith hand and foot with the chain he had made and cast him into prison. That is exactly what greed, evil desires, lust, impurity, and sexual immorality do to us. You work so hard at building this life of secrecy – of lust – and all the while all you've done is built the chains that bind you up and if you stay bound up will cast you into hell. Whatever it takes – God says put to death that which belongs to your earthly nature.

Ladies – let me make a comment here to you. I talked to the guys mainly in that first pitfall, but understand that the sins of lust and impurity and the like are problematic for you too. The stats are showing that there is a greatly increasing use of internet porn by women. The same principles apply to you, but women must also be careful to avoid inciting men to lust. Now listen – men are clearly responsible for their own sin, but if a woman or a girl purposeful incites a man to lust, she is responsible for her sin.

Arthur Pink put it this way: "If lustful looking is so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with the desire to be looked at and even lusted after are not less but perhaps more guilty. In this matter it is not only too often the case that men sin but women tempt them to do so. How great then must be the guilt of the great majority of modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of young men. And how greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses." You will want to be so careful in this area.

Finally – and with this I will wrap up. **All of these barriers you put up to avoid pitfalls will eventually FAIL if that is all you do.** Because remember, whacking the limbs is not enough, you have to go to the

root. And Paul said the root was greed - covetousness – wanting what is forbidden – it is idolatry. John Piper explains this as wanting something so much that you lose your contentment in God. So the opposite of covetousness is contentment: resting satisfied with God. In fact God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. If you'll remember back two weeks ago, we saw the importance of setting our thoughts – our hearts – on things above – because that is where Jesus is. To believe the promises of God are greater and better than the false promises of sin. **The fight against lust and these sins of perverted love is the fight to feed your faith with the precious & magnificent PROMISES of God** – let me just give you one that applies so clearly. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:8** "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The pure in heart – those who put to death these very sins – will see face to face the all satisfying God of glory.

And the way that we feed our faith in that promise – in that God – is exactly what we saw in verses 1-2. **We set our minds – we set our hearts on things above so that we not only PURSUE righteousness, but by the life of Christ in us we begin to PREFER righteousness!**

My guess is that there are many who are struggling here today and you hear what God is saying through Paul – the extreme steps to take – the depth of change required and you say "I can't do that – it's too much – it's too hard – it's too ingrained in my life."

I want you to look at Philippians 4 with me as we close. The verse everyone knows – chapter 4 verse 13: I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Do you know why Paul can say that? Look back two verses to verse 11 – what does he say there that is the foundation for verse 13? He says "for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

The greater your CONTENTMENT in God, the less your covetousness for sin, the more you can do all things through Christ.

Folks God is being clear today. If you truly have been raised with Jesus, then the process of living like who we are means first putting to death the things that we are not – at any cost.