

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 3:5-7

The Christian's Experience – A Putting Off (Part 1)

5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

When I was younger, a pre-teen, I was greatly afraid of elevators. Being somewhat claustrophobic, I just knew that every time I stepped into that elevator, I was going to get stuck and we would run out of air. To me, it was certain death. It did not matter if someone told me that there was no chance of suffocating in the elevator; I knew I would. And then, to top it off, I had a half dozen or so experiences of being stuck in an elevator, even using the phone once to call the fire department to come let me and a friend out. The fear of being trapped and perishing by encasement in an elevator how power over me. I would hyper ventilate at times. At other times I would hold my breath and sigh in relief once the doors opened. I was a mess.

But, as I grew up and learned more about elevators, I came to realize that there was nothing to my fear. For sure I would not suffocate and even if the elevator were to stop, they always get going again. Something changed in me. Something that gave me the power over my fear and I no longer cringe at the thought of an elevator. In fact, I rather enjoy them now.

I share this story because as we come to the next section of our study in the book of Colossians, we find ourselves looking at something that has changed for the believer in Jesus Christ. What once used to have power over him; and for what penalty that power brought upon the believer in his pre-saved state; these have been subdued and vanquished. And because of this, the believer is to have a different experience in light of his new position in Christ.

But just what am I talking about? What used to have power over us and caused us to be under the promise of penalty? In the picture that Paul paints for us in Colossians 3:5-17 we have portraits of two natures; the old, sinful, God-displeasing and wrath earning nature; and the new, holy, Christlike, God-pleasing and eternal life receiving nature. Sometimes this contrast is likened unto two men; the old man, with all its sin-corrupting power; and the new man, with all its Spirit-controlled power.

And now, the basic argument of our passage is this; since you have been raised to newness of life through belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and since positionally, so far as God is concerned, you are dead, that is your sin-nature is no longer in power; and since your life, the life that you live now is actually to be Christ living His life, His perfect sinless life in and through you; how then ought these theological truths actually be lived out in reality? What should be the Christian's experience with regard to the power and penalty of sin and with regard to the power and presence of Christ, who is your life (according to verse 4)?

In case you have not thought this through before; let me explain briefly what happens when a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as it pertains to our text. Before salvation, all God sees in us is our inherited sin nature from Adam. And because of this sin nature, we all deserve death, eternal separation from God As Romans 6:23 states, "**the wages of sin is death.**" Therefore we live in fear of death. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that Jesus came to "**render**

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powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil" and that he "might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." We find that not only does the devil have power to control and manipulate the unsaved mind, but the unsaved mind itself is also under the power of fear and slavery.

But when we believe in Christ and His death for us, something changes in us; this old nature, subject to the fear of death and of slavery to sin is freed. A new nature is given to the believer. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares,

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

This new nature, also called "**newness of life**" in Romans 6:4 is a nature that longs to know, serve and please God. Now all of this sounds great, does it not? But there is something we have not talked about and it is this; that as far as God is concerned, the old man is dead; the sin-nature is vanquished and we have been given the new nature, that is everything that pertains to life and godliness, by which we can live now live for God. But while that old nature is dead, so far as God is concerned, it still dwells with us; it is still a part of us and will be so until we receive our new, glorified bodies. So the believer has this new nature that longs to live for God and what should be an inactive old or sinful nature that is dead. But would you agree with me that sometimes that old man, that sin nature does not always *feel* dead? That sometimes we can live more like devils rather than like angels? It would be like me never getting over my fear of elevators. You could tell me that the elevator has plenty of air, that it rides in a shaft full of air, that even if it gets stopped it is only temporary and even at that, there is an escape hatch on the top by which I could get out. These are FACTS, but if I do not act on these FACTS, then I will continue to live in fear of elevators. *It is not enough for believers to know the FACTS about their position in Christ; they must also then strive to ACT according to their position in Christ*

For the believer in Christ, it is a FACT that you died with Christ, that your sins have been removed, that you no longer bear the penalty for your sins because Christ paid it for you; that you no longer are subject to follow or do sin; because Christ, by His Holy Spirit now dwells in you to guide you into all truth and practice; but if you do not ACT on these FACTS, then you will find yourself doing what your old nature wants, of continuing to live in slavery to sin and to fear.

For the Colossians, they were being told by false teachers that the way to deal with "sin" was through harsh treatment of the body; or physically beating sin out of yourself. For others it was through a rigorous keeping of rituals or commandments. And for even others it involved seeking extra-biblical revelations from supposedly angelic creatures. But how is the believer then to deal with this old nature, this old man? That is the subject of Colossians 3:5-9 and then beginning in verse 10 and working through verse 17, the subject is that of the new man or new self.

This morning then, we wish to examine how the believer, who can know the theological and theoretical truths of verses 1-4 actually translate those truths into his every day living? How do we turn the critical FACT of our position in Christ into a corresponding ACT? Or to say it another way, what is to be the believer's experience? So then our key point this morning is that the believer is to experience a putting off; a putting off of the old man.

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Let me make one more observation before we continue. Often times in the New Testament letters we find a stated moral imperative tied to a redemptive indicative. To say this more simply, we are never asked or commanded to do something for God (the moral imperative) without there being a stated purpose or means (the redemptive indicative) by which to strive to obey the command.

In our text, the redemptive indicative, the statement of fact and the means by which we will be able to strive to live for God is found in Colossians 3:1-4. We are raised with Christ, we, that is our sin natures, are dead and our true life is hidden with Christ and our lives are actually found in the life of Christ. Because of this truth, we are now called to ACT, the moral imperative, this putting off of the old man or old self.

Also, while believers are commanded in our text to ACT, to do something, we must never forget that we are not the cause; we do not have the power in and of ourselves to overcome any sin. What we are being told to do here is ACT in accordance to what Christ has done, what Christ accomplished on the cross for us. In other words, it is never by my own doing that I will ever put sin to death. Rather, because Christ has put sin to death, I am to live my life now in light of that truth. Christ rendered living in the sins listed in our text as powerless by His Cross and we who believe can live in light of this.

I. We Must Reckon Our Old Man Dead (3:5-9)

What does this putting off of the old man look like? Look at your text, at Colossians 3:5. Here we find our moral imperative. In light of the truth of our position in Christ, our practice is to **"consider the members of your earthly body as dead..."** Here the NASB has put it rather mildly. If you read the marginal reading of this verse you find it stated more starkly, "put to death the members which are upon the earth." The ESV says it even more bluntly, **"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you..."** This is strong, shocking language. I remember that a Christian music group got into trouble with many in the church because of a song entitled, "Killing My Old Man" – the chorus went:

*Killing my old man
You may not understand
He's a terrible man
Got to make a stand
And kill the old man*

This was deemed "too controversial" – too "in your face." And yet the Greek text would concur with the songwriter's sentiment. The Greek word found here, the command give to us is *nekrosate*, a present active verb that literally means, "put to death, mortify, be constantly killing that which is earthly in you. Because we have died with Christ and been raised with Christ, we are to consider, count, reckon, live and regard any earthly sin or vice as dead to ourselves. We are no longer under penalty for such sins and we are no longer to be under the power of such sins; therefore ACT as though you were dead, unable to act upon such sins. ^[slide 09] As one has aptly stated, *"The Holy Spirit demands that we actively appropriate the fact that we died with*

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*Christ to deprive the old nature of its efforts to use our living bodies as the instrument of its own expression."*¹

How profound is this statement? We must be constantly coming back to the truth that Jesus died for our sins and that we no longer then live for ourselves, or according to our old, sinful nature, but rather according to the new nature we received as the Holy Spirit made us new in Christ. Sometimes we might come across a person who is stingy or selfish, someone who purposely keeps things away from others so that they cannot use or enjoy them. Beloved, when it comes to sin and the old man, we are to be stingy and we must, according to Romans 13:14, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh (the old sin nature) in regard to its lusts.

So then, we must be putting to death, killing, reckoning as dead our own desires to do things contrary to what we read in God's Word as being consistent with being a genuinely saved person. And notice in our text that Paul has essentially two lists of sins, either sins of attitude or of action. There is a list of sins in verse 5 and another in verses 8-9. Why are there two lists? It would appear, if you take careful notice, that the list of sins of verse 5 are more personal and perhaps more internal; while the list of sins in verses 8-9 are more social and more external. Neither list is meant to identify every possible internal or external sin, but rather is given to provide a general understanding of such sins. Also, after both lists we find a reason for putting off the old man. So there is this revelation of both personal and social sins followed by the reason for putting such sins off.

In the time we have remaining, let us look then at this first list, this first revelation of the kind of sins that we are to purposely, actively and aggressively be putting to death or rejecting in our lives followed by the reason we must remember for doing this.

II. We Must Reject The Old Man's Deeds (3:5b)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

This list before us has as its primary focus any kind of perversion of true, Biblical love. It is amazing how much sin actually revolves around sex, and specifically an unbiblical view of sex. You have heard it stated many times that you don't have to watch TV very long before you begin to notice that much of what is advertized is promoted with sex or has some kind of sexual overtones. Much of modern secular music is the same way. Nothing much has changed in 2000 years as Paul was dealing with the same temptations for the believers at Colossae. So, while this list has a primary focus on perverted views of sex, let us remember that lusts and desires for anything that takes our focus off of God would be a sin that is to be rejected and we are to consider our members, be it our mind, our eyes, our hands, or any part of our bodies as dead to these things.

First mentioned is *immorality* or "*porneia*" in the Greek from which we get our word *pornography*. "Immorality" is any form of illegitimate sexual behavior; any sexual activity that is not in accord with God's Word (Ephesians 5:3, Galatians 5:19). According to God, the only rightful place for sexual relations is within a God recognized marriage. So any kind of giving oneself even to the thoughts and desires of fornication, adultery, homosexuality or other such

¹ Phillips, John "Exploring Colossians," p. 168

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sexual sins are to be rejected. We are to actively and aggressively guard our hearts, our minds and our bodies from indulging in such behavior. You might want to note that the sin of immorality; of thinking about sex outside the proper arena of marriage is always mentioned first in the Biblical "sin lists" and is always emphatically forbidden by God.

As those raised with Christ and dead to our old selves, we ought to be eager to comply with this command to see immorality put to death in our bodies. How many lives have been ruined because of immorality? There would be very few in this room whose lives have not been impacted somehow by this sin. The Christian's experience is to see himself dead to immorality.

The second sin is that of *impurity*. "Impurity" or *akatharsis* in the Greek means "that which is not pure or clean." Whereas immorality tends to refer more to the act of sexual sins, "impurity" speaks more to the thoughts and intentions of the mind; the thinking or dwelling on such things. In 1 Thessalonians 4:7, in the context of sexual purity, we read:

For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity [an unbiblical dwelling on things sexual], but in sanctification [a pursuing of things holy; God-honoring].

I make no apologies save to some of our tender ears, but this is God's Word to us; calling us to put to death any pre-conversion sins of lust. To be done with any kind of sexual uncleanness in our imaginations or speech; to be killing of any lustful fantasies of a sexual nature. We must be done with such things. In fact, Paul pleads with the believers at Ephesus saying in Ephesians 5:3 -

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper for among the saints...

The church of Jesus Christ is to be a place known for its purity, holiness and her devotion to both God and His Word. Do not let your mind wander.

The next sin listed is that of *passion*. "**Passion**" here speaks of inordinate affection, of misplaced longings for things sexual. "Passion" is the pursuit of sexual excess. This is what Jesus was speaking of in Matthew 5:27-28 when He said:

27 You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

This is the idea of being dominated by a desire for unrighteous sexual fulfillment. When our desire for such things exceeds our desire for godliness and purity, we are but one step away from acting on such desire. Put such things to death, be it on the TV, on the Internet, in a magazine or through any media that excites such a passion in your heart.

The fourth sin mentioned here is that of *evil desire*. "**Evil desire**" is ultimately any longing that goes against God and His Word. This sin comes before greed or lust because illicit sexual conduct is ultimately an evil desire against God's holy Word. Just read Romans 1:18-24 and you see how evil desire is the root of sexual impurity and its offense to a holy God. We are to count our bodies dead to any desired that go against God's Word.

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The fifth sin listed is that of *greed*. "**Greed**" is essentially lust; an unchecked hunger for sexual pleasure (or anything that draws our longings away from God and godliness). It is never satisfied desire always wanting to have more. Of course, we can be greedy for a number of things, but here the context is primarily focused on being dissatisfied with God's plan and stated guidelines for sexuality. Anyone who entertains sexual thoughts, whether married or not, is expressing a dissatisfaction with where God has you; either with your spouse or with your singleness. To consider my body dead to "greed" is to learn to be content with what God has provided me rather than pursuing the god of self in wanting more.

And finally then we have the sin of "**idolatry**." All sexual sin, greed and dissatisfaction with God is counted as idolatry, the placement of personal desire, sexual or otherwise, over desire for God. We see an example of this sexual greed and idolatry in the life of Israel. In Numbers 25:1-3 we read:

25 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel.

Here we see that sexual sin has a direct connection to idolatry. Beloved, let us be careful, let us be diligent to count our bodies dead to such things so that we might live to the glory of God. As the Puritan John Owen has said, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." Sin never takes a day off and your old man never stops looking for opportunities to rise again. Put it to death!

III. We Must Remember Why We Are To Put Off Our Old Man (3:6-7)

Notice that Paul does not leave it at simply identifying the nature of person sins, but then he also supplies a reason for us to remember why we are to put off this old man. We read in verses 6-7, "**6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.**"

Such behavior, the pursuit of illicit sex, of lustful living and of greed of any sort is what one ought to expect from the unsaved. But as believers in Jesus Christ, we have been saved from this kind of behavior positionally at the Cross. Jesus died for such sins so now, in practice, why would we pursue them? Beloved, we are delivered practically from such sins as we claim our position, our birthright as believers in Christ, living in the power of our resurrected, raptured and returning Savior.

Notice in verses 6-7 then the two reasons we are given to remember as to why we ought not to live for such things but be dead to them. First, such sins invite the anger, the hot anger or wrath of God. For those whose lives are unchanged, who do not experience the rebirth that comes from belief in Jesus, whose lives are characterized not by obedience to God, but rather disobedience; these will experience not the glory of God in Christ as believers to, but the great wrath and hot displeasure of God. Not to trivialize this, but to give an example, its like the person who shows you a bruise on his arm as says, "it really hurts to push on it" – to which you would respond, "then stop pushing on it!" If you know that your life is governed by a preoccupation with sin, sexual or otherwise; and you know that such sin will hurt, actually destroy you; then stop it; put your body to death in regard to such sins. You had your life in these things, but no more.

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The second reason given by which we are to remember why we put to death the old man is that we know this is how we used to be, **we "also once walked, when you were living in them"** but no longer. This implies that you have experienced a change of heart toward such things. That at some point you did agree with God that such things are wrong, sinful, hurtful toward you and others and hateful toward God. But in the new birth, in receiving Jesus Christ as Savior, you realize that you have been saved from such things. We are no longer controlled by the power of sin and subject to its penalty. Because we are in Christ, we are to be controlled by Christ and as 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 reminds us, to live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf.

As we close, let me ask you a few questions to ponder as we come to the Lord's Table:

1. Are there areas of immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and/or greed that you need to confess to God? Remember such things amount to idolatry, which God hates and will not invited God's blessings in your life, but rather God's discipline at best or God's wrath at worse.
2. Can you identify the difference between how you used to live before coming to Christ and how you live today? Can you identify the difference between how you lived just last year or even just last month and how you live for Jesus today? If not, there is an area of confession.
3. Are there any other sins in your life you need to confess and consider your life dead to such things so that you might properly and gloriously reflect the person of Jesus in all that you do?

Lord, grant us this day Your insight to see the areas of our lives that do not line up with Your glory and who we are in Christ. Help us, we pray, to put to death such habits, thoughts and lifestyles that are not worthy of our calling in Jesus Christ. And Lord, we pray that our lives might reflect the wonder of Christ all the more so that others will see Him, who He is, as our Savior and Lord and call upon Him for salvation. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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