

## The Things That Must Be Left Behind

Colossians 3:1-11 (5-11)

A young boy was talking on the phone. His father was listening, "Hello, sir, I was calling you to see if you could use a lawn boy to do your yard work!"

"Oh, I see you already have one! Well, is he doing your work to your satisfaction?"

"He is! Thank you, sir, I was just checking," then the young boy hung up the phone.

The father looked at his son and said, "Sorry son, you didn't get the job!"

"Oh, no sir," said the boy. "I've already got that job. I was just calling to check up on myself!"

And that is what we are asked to do. Church and devotional activities are one way to check up on ourselves. Good friends and family can help us with examining our opinions, beliefs, and habits. Asking, what would Jesus do, is a good self check on our actions, attitudes and habits. We get into real trouble when we refuse to consider the many ways we have, to take a hard look at ourselves. Even the information or truths we do not like or trust. And that is what Paul does. After theology comes ethical demands. Doctrine demands dutiful obedience. Holiness requires appropriate behavior.

The language of Colossians 3:1-4 is imaged, metaphorical. It talks about "being raised with Christ," about "Christ being seated at the right hand of God," about the "things of above," about the final revelation of Christ which will mean the revelation of the Christ believers. The language of these verses reflects a very particular worldview. It's basically, set your mind on Christ. Paul is clear. He knows the people in Colossae were facing many philosophical & religious options, none of which are neutral.

It's important to notice he doesn't teach, "Just add Jesus to what you already believe." Or "Factor Jesus into your philosophy of living." Or "Include Jesus in this or that ritual." The

claim that "Jesus is Lord," does not allow that. If Jesus is Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all creation, then all other teachings must give way. We must bow before Him and only Him.

A way to summarize *verses 1 to 4* is: Look up! We have been raised with Jesus. Set our minds on heaven not on earthly things. We have died; are alive in Christ; and hidden in Him. He will come again. We will appear with Him in glory.

So, in Colossians 3, we move from doctrine to conduct. This is very similar to the outline of the Book of Romans, where the first eleven chapters contain rich truths, and the final chapters focus on how to live them out. The same is true of the Book of Ephesians. What we believe determines how we behave, how we think, our speech, habits, and attitudes.

Specifically, in Colossians, we've learned that if we get Christ right, we get everything else right. Jesus is supreme over His creation, His church, and now we will see in chapters 3 and 4 that He is supreme over the Christian. There are practical implications that should be evident if one surrenders to the supremacy of Jesus. So we move from principle to practice, from the indicative to the imperative. It does us and our witness little good if we can declare and defend the truth but fail to demonstrate it in our lives. May we pray that we are not like those described in Titus 1:16: "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him."

Warren Wiersbe reminds us that the pagan religions of Paul's day taught little or nothing about personal morality: "A worshipper could bow before an idol, put his offering on the altar, and go back to the same old life of sin. What a person believed had no direct relationship with how they behaved." Being a follower of Jesus, is much different. Duty is connected to doctrine.

Paul has been arguing that we are set free from the powers around us, and now he tells us that we have been set free for living a life above moral reproach. Our Creator's plan is to first make us new; then we are challenged to live as new people. In short, we do not have to be like

we have always been. We can break free from the past, if we know where to look and are willing to learn. That's much more important than our common understandings of freedom.

So let's dive into **verse 5**. "Kill your earthly impulses." "Put to death these parts of you which are earthly." "Look out for the sinful, earthly things lurking within you." When we have our eyes on Christ; once we understand what Christ accomplished on the Cross for us; and the power that is available to believers, we need to consider as dead, the life which belongs to our old nature and is ruled by that which is earthly. We have two lists: verse 5, refers to unholy, perverted kinds of love, and the verses 8 & 9 list refers to different kinds of hate.

Verse 5, "Put to death, loose sex, impure actions, unbridled sensuality, wicked thoughts, and greed." This is just one of many lists the Bible gives us. Paul makes the point that our old nature will continue to weaken, hinder our Christian life if we do not take action. So we focus on Christ & the things which are eternal.

Paul is telling us to look out so that anytime we see these desires begin to awaken in our lives we need to put them to death. We need to be zealous for God's honor by putting them to death. Notice that we are not to put them aside. We are not to wound them or even ask them to leave. We are not to experiment or play around flirt with them, rationalize them or even explain them away. Instead, we are to kill them. We are to thrust our spears right through them.

We must refuse to judge by externals; we must reject false authority; and we need to be really careful about religious rules. But that does not mean we can do whatever we want as believers. Grace trumps legalism but Paul makes it very clear in Romans 6:1-2 that we are no longer to let sin rule over us: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

There is a story in the Old Testament, *Numbers 25*, that makes us uncomfortable. It's about

Phinehas and Israel. He was not afraid to deal with sin. Israel was just about to enter the Promised Land after 40 years of hanging out in the desert. Now you would expect to find them really pumped up and excited about being so close to entering the Land. Instead of thanking God, the men of Israel are sleeping with foreign women and worshiping false gods. Needless to say, God's anger burned against the Israelites and so he sent a plague among the people.

In the midst of God's judgment, one guy was so brash that he didn't even try to hide his sin. He marched right in front of the people with a Midianite maiden and took her into his tent to sleep with her. Picture the scene. The people of God are weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting because of their sin and the plague that is wiping them out, and this guy walks right by them flaunting his sin. Have you ever noticed how sexual sin can cause a normally smart person to do some pretty stupid stuff?

Well, Phinehas saw what was going on, grabbed his spear, ran to the man's tent and drove the spear through both the man and the woman as they lay together. The plague immediately stopped, but not before 24,000 people were killed. As nasty as this story is, notice what God says in Numbers 25:11: "Phinehas ...has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor..." Phinehas was looking up as verses 1 to 4 tell us to, and he was looking out against sin. God has reasons this kind of story is in the Bible.

We like to hear positive messages and don't like negative ones. But negative warnings and commands grow out of the positive truths of Christian doctrine. If we are honest with ourselves, we would admit we do need, a list of "do not's." We need clarity. God loves us too much to allow us to mess up our lives with sin. He made us and knows what is best for us. That is why we are encouraged and commanded to obey our Creator. We are to live in purity and enjoy sexual expression within the bounds of monogamous marriage.

Brian Bill says that the Apostle Paul talks about sexual sin more than any other sin and gives three reasons for this. **First, Sexual sin is different than other sins.** 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 instructs us: “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside their body, but the one who sins sexually sins against their own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.”

The emphasis we hear today is on “safe sex.” And if it feels right and good..... But there is no prophylactic for the soul. Sexual sin of all kinds, will take us further than we want to go and cost us more than we want to pay. We need to understand that sexual expression is not just something we do; it reflects who we are.

**A second reason** Paul talks about sexual sin is, **Sexual sin was and is everywhere.** Sex outside of marriage was accepted as the norm in Paul’s day and was actually part of many pagan religious rituals. I don’t need to tell you how pervasive sex is today, in all kinds of ways, because we see it promoted everywhere. Any perversion is accepted by some people today. Nothing is off limits. But Christianity brought the concept of chastity into the world.

**And a third reason** to talk about sex is, **Sexual sin destroys people. It ruins families.** Satan knows that he can trip up every one by using sex. David was wiped out for a period of time because of his sin with Bathsheba. Families and marriages are destroyed on a regular basis because of infidelity. Sex was Samson’s and Solomon’s downfall.

Let’s look briefly at the list of sins in **verse 5.** **Sexual immorality** is a general term & refers to any form of illicit sexual behavior. We get our word “pornography” from this Greek word.

Next is **Impurity**, which is marked by a mind that is filled with sensually suggestive thoughts that reads sex into even the most wholesome of situations. The Phillips paraphrase uses the term,

dirty mindedness. II Corinthians 10:5 tells us, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Third, is **Lust.** Lust seeks quick fulfillment and always wants more. Love takes work and deepens over time. Lust focuses only on the senses, but love uses the senses to cherish the other & to nourish the soul. It is being dominated by sexual feelings and desires, plus many other things. We become slaves to our passions.

Fourth on the list is **Evil desires.** Our physical desires are divinely given but they become evil when they are motivated by the sinful nature and are executed for evil ends. Desires lead to deeds, so we must purify our minds and hearts. Wicked thoughts can go way beyond sex.

Last is **Greed.** It’s the sin of wanting more. In this context, it can apply to satisfying sexual immorality, lust, impurity and any evil desire. The person who is never satisfied with what they have is usually envious of what others have. It is the opposite of the desire to give.

A man who lived with his elderly aunt expected to inherit her small fortune. But he didn't wait for her to die naturally. The newspaper reported that he killed her by giving her an overdose of medication. He's now in prison. Greed destroys

Sin leads to idolatry, when things and people end up taking the place of God, instead of setting our minds on Christ in heaven above. If we study this list carefully we can list specific sins, beyond this list, all of which lead to idolatry. Idolatry is putting anything, in the place of our Creator. That’s a dangerous place to be.

Then in **verses 6 & 7** we are told, “It’s because of these sins that God’s wrath is coming, upon the sons and daughters of those who are disobedient. Avoid sinning at all costs. The items on this list and the next list, “are the same things you once pursued, and together you spawned a life of evil.” This is a direct warning.

Verses 6 and 7 point out the reasons to put to death our old nature or manner of living. So that no one minimize these vices, **verse 6** points out that God's wrath will come upon those who do such things.

Signs were posted instructing skiers to keep off a certain slope. The large clear signs said, "Danger! Out Of Bounds!" But in spite of the warnings, several skiers went into the area. The result? Four of the disobedient were buried beneath a half-mile-wide avalanche of tons of snow & rock. The tragedy would never have happened if the warning had been heeded.

God posts clear warning signs in the Bible to tell us what kinds of behavior and attitudes are off-limits. Let's not ignore the warnings. Let's not convince ourselves that nothing bad will happen to us or that we can turn back if we sense danger. Sin is thrilling – until it's not and the consequences kick in.

**Verse 7** honestly states that these sins are what we did in the Colossians' and our pre-Christian experience. "And in them you also once walked, when you were living in them." Both verbs are in the past tense. We used to walk in them in the life we once lived. That kind of life and conduct belongs to the past. So we really need to look out and leave them in the past, as we keep our focus on looking up.

Then to emphasize this, Paul continues with a look out reminder, **verses 8 and 9**: "But now make sure you shed such things: anger, rage, spite, slander and abusive language. Don't go on lying to each other." Those in Christ are to demonstrate a new attitude toward sin. This new attitude not only applies to lustful sins, but it also applies to sins of speech that come out of sins of hateful attitudes.

Notice the term, "But now." This conveys the familiar biblical imagery of putting off old filthy smelling clothing for new baptismal clean clothes. This putting off the old self, the old way of living, symbolizes the tradition of putting off street clothing to be baptized in white robes. Jesus has broken the power of the old nature in

& over believers by His death and resurrection. Now his followers must put faith in that act. We must trust Holy Spirit power so we experience the liberation that comes from living in Christ's resurrection victory.

Let's take a quick look at this second list of sins to put to death. **Anger** refers to smoldering, resentful bitterness that refuses to be pacified. It becomes a subtle habit if not addressed.

**Wrath, Rage, and Temper** refers to a temporary blaze of sudden anger. It is like setting fire to straw. It flames furiously. Quickly burns out. But fuels malice, spite, and the sins of speech.

**Malice or spite** is the result of wrath. It refers to general evil or wickedness. It indicates a vicious disposition which promotes injury to others. It is the sin of ill-will toward others.

The other sins on this list are verbal. **Slander, abusive language, foul talk, and lying** are some of the sins that come out of our mouths. They are a result of the previous mentioned sins and are forbidden. Instead, our speech is to be kind, pure and true. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." If we chose to say something, say what is edifying, necessary, and gracious.

A godless verbal environment will corrupt our minds. Dirty words, impure language and swearing are common today. So are the sins mentioned here. Our best defense is the Holy Spirit who, if allowed to control us; can check a filthy word before it slips out. He can clean up the coarsest language.

In an eyewitness report of the Welsh revival of 1904, G. C. Morgan wrote, "The horses are terribly puzzled. A manager said to me, 'The haulers are some of the very lowest sort. They have driven their horses by obscenity & kicks. Now they can hardly persuade the horses to start working, because there is no obscenity and no kicks.'"

If we have a problem with our language, we ought to pray daily, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). We need more puzzled horses. A heart cannot be pure, whose tongue is not clean! Ephesians 4:29 instructs us, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." This includes this list of verbal sins.

In *verse 9a* we find *lying*. Lying or falsehood is a problem of ill-will toward others. Someone has observed that sin has many tools, but a lie is a handle that fits them all. We need to tell the truth. Lying to one another disrupts unity by destroying trust. It tears down relationships and can lead to serious conflicts. As people of the truth, we must discipline ourselves to speak the truth. If Christians can't speak the truth, who can? So let's examine our words and actions. Are they truthful at all times? Our witness and integrity is always being tested.

Then *verses 9b and 10* encourage us to look inward. "Since you have sloughed away your old skin along with its evil practices for a fresh new you, which is continually renewed in knowledge according to the image of the One who created you." Another way to say this is, "strip off the old self and put on the new self."

Why? So we can have renewed knowledge, real knowledge in the likeness of the Creator. This is another reminder that what the church has been receiving from the false teachers was false knowledge, not the real knowledge of God. Notice, this is not just a command to keep, but a truth to claim. It's already been done. We are exhorted to stop doing certain things because we can stop. We are different, therefore we can act differently. As we look in, we realize that we are no longer what we once were. God has restored us to his image.

Warren Wiersbe puts it this way: "We were formed in God's image and deformed from God's image by sin. But through Jesus Christ, we can be transformed into God's image once again." This is where we take the responsibility to renew our minds according to Romans 12:2:

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will." That's Good News!

The things of the old self rob us of the opportunity to become more like Christ, which is why we must put it off and put on the new. A

The story goes that a man went duck hunting with one his employees named Sam. On the way in a horse and carriage, a rim came off one of the wheels. As Sam hammered it back on, he accidentally hit his finger and let go with a couple of bad words. He quickly fell to his knees and prayed, asking God's forgiveness. "Lord, it's so, difficult at times to live the Christian life."

"Sam," said his boss, "I know you're a Christian. But tell me, why do you struggle so? I'm an atheist. I don't have problems like that."

Sam was silent. Just then two ducks flew overhead. The boss raised his gun and two shots rang out. "Leave the dead one & go after that wounded bird," he shouted.

Sam pointed at the duck that was fluttering desperately to escape and said, "I've got an answer for you now, Boss. You implied that my Christianity isn't any good because I have to struggle so. Well, I'm like that wounded duck, and I struggle to get away from the devil. But Boss, you're the dead duck! Satan's got you and you are not trying to get away."

That down-to-earth insight is a fit description of the Christian experience. Struggle is evidence that God is at work in our lives [Romans 7:14-25]. Flutter is a sign of life. Strength to go on and find God's forgiveness for failures. Keep moving! If Jesus lives within you, sin need not overwhelm you.

So claim the power of resurrection living today. Christ has victory over sin, including each of our specific sins. Do not let sin rob us of joy and freedom. Resurrection Living is comes from being surrendered to Jesus and His will for us.

Then God can bring cycles of surrender, death, resurrection, commitment and liberation to bear again & again with each aspect of our life. So pray for specific help, to leave the things that must be left behind, so we can fully be what verses 1 to 4 describe us to be.