

Colossians 3:1-6: Killing Sinful Desires - Part 1

This morning we see a fairly large transition in Paul's letter. We go from talking about theology to talking about how we live as believers. This is actually a pretty common theme in his letters. The first 11 chapters of the book of Romans is the closest thing we have in Scripture to a Systematic Theology. Then he spends the next 5 chapters talking about how we live life. Same thing with Ephesians: the first 3 chapters are theology, the next 3 are practical living. Why does he do that?

Paul does that because he knows that following Jesus isn't just about living out a bunch of commands. It's about remembering who we are in God's family.

When I was younger, to be honest, I didn't really understand a lot of the theological statements that Paul made. I didn't really understand them. It was just easier for me to go to the end of his letters and read what I should and should not do - the list of commands. I'd read them, feel guilty, try to do better, and on I'd go. I think that's probably true for a lot of us: Maybe we don't quite understand why Paul needs to spend so much time talking about the law or our identity or whatever, we just want to know what to do and not to do.

But here's the Paul's reasoning: Following Jesus is not primarily about keeping a list of commands. Do we keep commands? Of course we do. Jesus says: If you love me, you'll keep my commandments.

But what Paul knows is that people need to be reminded who they are in order to understand what they do.

If you go into the military there is the Code of US Fighting Force that guides your actions. The idea is you are a soldier, so here is how you act.

If you go into the legal profession, there is a code of conduct in a courtroom. The idea is you are a lawyer, this is you act.

If you're my child, there is a code of conduct for our household. Who you are - an Upchurch - determines what you do.

The same is true as a Christian. Our identity is in Jesus. And our identity is what determines how we live. Put another way: who you are then what you do.

Scholars call this the indicative / imperative distinction. Paul spends the first part of his letters talking about the indicative: who we are in Jesus. And then he spends the rest of the letter talking about imperatives - commands - what we do as followers of Jesus.

And that's what he's getting to here. If you are united with Jesus by faith. If you are a Christian. If you have died with Jesus, this is how you act. **Read 2:20-21**

If this is true about you - that you have died with Jesus. That you've been united with him in his death. Then why would you act like you're living under the Law? **Read 3:1-2**

Same thing, only this is the positive of what we are to do. If we've been raised with Christ. If the Spirit has given us new life because we've trusted in Jesus, then we don't go back to following the Law; we set our mind on things above. We set our mind on Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is our everything. All that we have, all that we are is now wrapped up in Jesus. **Read 2-4**

What does he mean? Basically he means that if we are Christians, our whole lives are defined by Jesus. Jason no longer exists. Jason died. And now my life is hidden with Christ. It's covered up by Christ.

I don't want to be silly here, but It's as though for the rest of my life I'm wearing a Jesus suit. Jason's gone, and the part that I'm playing now is the part of Jesus.

Rom. 8:29: We were predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son [Jesus].

God saved us so that we would be like Jesus. We would reflect his holiness and image. Here our lives are hidden with Christ in God. We don't get to cop out of obedience to God by saying "This is just who I am." No, salvation from our sins means we have died and are defined by Jesus.

So that's who we are. And here Paul is going to tell us how we live that out. If we've died with Jesus there are things we put to death. **Read 5a, 8-9**

So these are things we kill, we put to death, we get out of our life. And he also lists things that, if we're believers, we are to do. **Read 12-14**

So what we're going to do this morning is cover the first half of things we put to death. These are things Paul says that if you have been raised with Christ. If you are united with Jesus by faith in his death and resurrection, we need to kill these things in our lives. We'll cover 5 of them this morning.

Note: What we're going to talk about this morning is rather weighty. It won't be explicit, but it is weighty. And I want to remind you of two things. First, if you struggle with these sins, you're not the only one. There's a reason Paul includes these: because the people of God have struggled with them since the dawn of time. Second, because these are serious, we are called to put them to death. We can kill them and we must kill them.

1) If you have died with Christ then you will Kill Sexual Immorality. **Read 5**

Before we get to talking about sexual immorality, I want to take a minute just to state the obvious: The Bible is very pro sexual intimacy. The Bible has a vision for God-honoring sexual relationships that are enjoyable and pleasing to God.

Often times the world looks at us as prudes and nay-sayers because we talk a lot about what people shouldn't be doing. As Christians who are to be lights in the world we actually do need to talk about what God has designed. That begins by talking about sexual intimacy with our children - which can be tough. But it also includes talking about intimacy with our spouses. Which can be tough, especially if our relationship with our spouse is struggling.

Listen, God designed man, designed woman, designed that our bodies were formed and shaped in certain ways and designed the sexual union to be a good thing within the context of marriage.

The classic illustration is that a fire in your house in the middle of winter can either be a very good thing or a very bad thing. If the fire is contained to your wood stove and heating the whole house, that's a good thing. If the fire gets out and your living room is on fire, that's a bad thing. The problem is our society thinks it's narrow minded for us to say that setting your house on fire is a bad thing. The other problem is that Christians often forget to tell people that there is a good, gospel-honoring way that the proverbial fire can be used. It's in the marriage union of one man and one woman.

So as we're thinking about sexual *immorality*, remember that we need to keep in mind that we have the only reliable truth about what sexual *morality* is. What the sinful world does with sex is not a legitimate alternative to God's plan for sex, it's a deviation from God's plan. It's a perversion of what God has designed for our good and for his glory.

And because of that Paul says that if you have died with Christ - if you have been united with Jesus in his death - then certain things about your old self also need to be put to death. And the first is sexual immorality. The Gk word is porneia, where we get the word pornography. Some of our translations have fornication, which is an older word.

In its narrowest sense it is simply sexual activity between two unmarried people, as opposed to adultery which is sinful sexual activity of married people. But in a broad sense - how it's used here - it basically means any

unauthorized sexual activity. I won't go into detail on a lot of things because we have little ones here. But this includes viewing naked people, such as pornography online or on your phone in a movie.

It could be thinking about someone in a sexual way.

Turn to Matt. 5:27-30. This is important because it's not just the acts of sexual immorality. Jesus calls his followers to have purity of mind and mouth as well. **Read**

Now, certainly Jesus doesn't mean literally cutting off our hand and foot. This is hyperbole. His point is that we are to do radical things to get rid of sin. And, I think, such radical things that other people might even take notice.

Again, this is not literal, but imagine coming to church and seeing a man with his hand chopped off. He had his hand last week, but now it's wrapped up in a bandage. And another guy has a bandage over his eye. And you don't want to be rude, but you ask: "May I asked what happened?" And he said candidly, "My eye was causing me to sin, so I tore it out." Now he lives in public, open shame. The world knows he's a sinner, knows his weakness. But he doesn't sin.

You know when people sin sexually it's often the easiest thing in the world to cure. But it looks foolish. "Why don't you have the phone / internet / cable tv?" Can you imagine not having a smart phone in this day and age? You can if you want to get to heaven. Let me tell you: It's better that you look completely foolish and shameful and obtuse and enter heaven, than you look really cool with an iPhone and go to hell.

Beloved, guard your heart, even if it makes you look foolish.

In our day this warning against sexual immorality includes homosexuality, transgenderism. **Turn to 1 Cor. 6:9-11**

There is some debate these days as to whether or not the Bible calls homosexuality a sin. Let me assure you it does. In **Rom. 1:26-27** Paul calls lesbian relationships and homosexual relationships dishonorable, shameless, contrary to nature, and in error. No where in the Bible is it seen as a legitimate relationship nor are there any places where it is honored. Here in **1 Cor.** He essentially lumps it in with a whole slew of sins we need to be reminded are, in fact, sin. **Read 9-10.**

Some of this list is back in **Col. 3.** Here we see the technical distinction between sexual immorality (unmarried sin) alongside adultery (married sin) as well as homosexuality. This is any deviation from God's good design for sex inside of marriage. By the way, the transgender movement is just homosexuality by another name. If a person is not acting according to the anatomy God has given him or her, it's sin.

To use the earlier analogy, if the fire is anywhere other than the fireplace it's a bad thing. If sex is anywhere other than in a one man one woman marriage it's sin. And two things we need to keep in mind here. First, homosexuality isn't the worst sin to ever take place. It's just sort of tossed into a list here alongside stealing, greed and drunkenness. As Christians we need to make sure people understand the Bible is just as much against stealing and adultery as it is against homosexuality. In fact, I might suggest adultery is actually worse only because of the devastating impact it has on the institution of marriage and the children.

Second, God can and does deliver people from these sins! **Read 11**

God doesn't just leave us wallowing in our sinfulness. No, Paul says if you have faith in Christ as your Savior, you have been washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus. Maybe you're a believer who struggles with these things. Welcome to the club! On the one hand we need to remember that these are deadly sins. On the other hand we need to remember that through faith in Christ we've not only been forgiven of these sins, but we've been given the power to overcome them!

What Paul is calling for us to do back in **Col. 3** is to put these things to death. The older translations have "mortify." Kill it. **Read 5**

The idea here is that we have to take action to kill sin and sinful impulses in our bodies. It's almost as though Paul depicts sin as being these little deadly creatures that come up in our lives and we have to kill them.

You ever played Whack-a-Mole at the arcade? That game where there's a box with a bunch of holes in it and these little mole looking creatures randomly pop their heads up and you beat them back down with a padded baseball bat?

That's kind of the idea except Paul doesn't say beat sin with a padded baseball bat, he says slay it. Slaughter it. Cut it's head off with a sword.

God said to Cain all the way back in Gen. 4 that "sin is crouching at the door [with the idea to kill you]. It's desire is for you but you must rule over it." Either you destroy sin or sin destroys you. It's just that simple.

Paul's point here is that if you've died with Christ - if you're united with him in his death - you are to put sexual immorality to death. And not only are we commanded to put it to death, we **can** put sexual immorality to death. Through the Spirit we have the ability to do it. If you are struggling with this sin and don't know how to put it to death, ask for help.

2) If you have died with Christ, we are called to Kill Impurity. **Read 5**

Now, to some extent the first 4 of these words overlap a little. Sexual immorality, impurity and passion are often used interchangeably to refer to sexual sins. And that could be the case here. But I think it's safe to say that this is a little more broad. Impurity - wonder of wonders - is really just anything that is not pure before the Lord. It's anything that is corrupted.

For something to be impure all you have to do is take something that is good and wholesome and corrupt it just a little bit. If you're doing homework and you cheat just a little on the homework that's impurity. If you're doing a business deal and you knowingly cut corners just a little bit that's impurity.

When I lived in the Tri Cities I worked for a very high end remodeling company. And I loved it because the owner had incredibly high standards. We'd do \$100k kitchen remodels, \$50k bathroom remodels. We made a fair amount of money, but there was no impurity in our jobs. And I remember a Christian lady came in and they had saved all their life for a nice kitchen when they retired - they had a \$30k budget. So we were installing the kitchen, almost done and when we went to put in the countertops one of the bottoms of the inside corners was chipped. You could barely see it. And I remember the lady coming in telling us "it's okay, just install it glue it and call it good." And the owner said "not a chance" - we don't deliver 99% kitchens. You ordered 1 complete kitchen remodel and it will be 100%.

That's the idea with impurity: not even a little bit of compromise. Not even a little bit of sinfulness.

Eph. 5:3 (NIV): There must not even be a hint of impurity among us.

Can you imagine if I invited you over to my house and served you coffee. And you finished your first cup and said, "that's a great cup of coffee." And I said, "Yeah, it's 99% filtered water, 1% toilet water." Are you going to ask for a second cup?

That's how impurity works in our spiritual lives as well. You know what the problem with impurities are? They don't seem like a big deal. They're just small compromises, small cutting of corners. But that's where compromise begins. If we're not willing to kill the small impurities, we will never kill the big ones.

You look at people who end up in cataclysmic sin, or even people who walk away from Jesus completely. It is rarely because of a one time decision to do something majorly wrong. It's usually a long string of very small impurities, very small compromises, all along the way.

What ever those small compromises are for us, we need to put them to death.

3) If we have died with Christ we are called to Kill Passions. **Read 5**

Passions and evil desires are often used in connection to sexual sin because sexual sin is often a result of our passions getting out of control.

There's a well known preacher named Paul Washer and he was talking to his high school boys about not being alone in a car with their girlfriends. And the son shot back, "Don't you trust me?" And he said, "No! I don't even trust myself to be alone with a woman." You say, "What kind of creep is this guy?" He's the kind of creep like Billy Graham and VP Mike Pence who refuse to be alone with a woman who is not their spouse. He's the kind of creep who we will never read a headline about like half our politicians because he has given no opportunities for those passions and evil desires to be expressed.

Most sexual sins don't happen as a result premeditation. Rarely do people plan out their sexual sins. They happen in a moment of sinful, fleshly passion and they continue often with little or no thought to the future.

That's true with a lot of other kinds of sinful passions as well. Your passion could be competitiveness. I've seen a lot of sinful passion around board games or basketball games or card games.

I've seen a lot of sinful passion in political discussions or theological discussions or discussions about how to raise children or financial investments.

We don't plan to get worked up, our flesh just rises up. Your heart starts pounding, get a little shaky, start accusing people of things, courtesy goes out the window. You know what Paul says to do? We need to kill that stuff.

Look over at **Jas. 4:1-4**. We're not called to be boring or dispassionate or robots. But we are called to be self-controlled and humble. That doesn't always mean we need to stop playing games or having conversations. Sometimes that means we need to repent from our selfish goals and pride in those times. And realign our desires around God's desires. **Read 1-4**

Why do we fight? What arouses our passions? We want something and we're not getting it. That's most of why we blow up in sinful passion. Or we are getting something we don't want. We really want to win the political argument but they just don't get it! What is wrong with them!? Maybe we should be asking: what's wrong with us? Jesus didn't call us to make Republicans or Democrats. He called us to make disciples. He didn't call us to make layups / monopolies / checkmates, he called us to make disciples.

4) If we are in Christ we are called to Kill Covetousness. **Read 5**

I didn't detail evil desire, because again these overlap a fair amount. But I do want to touch on covetousness. Covetousness is not a word we use a lot. It basically means to desire someone else's things in a wrong way. It's the 10th commandment in the OT.

Exo. 20:17: You shall not covet you neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or his iPad / car / financial portfolio / intelligence / family.

It's wanting what's not yours to have. And I think it's helpful to make some distinctions here.

Some examples: If you're single it's not wrong to want to be married. It's wrong to want some one else's spouse. Does that make sense?

It's not wrong to want a car. It's wrong to want someone else's car.

It's not wrong to want a computer, it's wrong to want a person's computer.

It's wrong to fantasize some way that what another person has will end up as yours. Like the Prodigal son who wished that his dad were dead so he could have his father's wealth, it's wrong to want someone to die to have their money / house / car.

Like David who couldn't have Bathsheba as long as Uriah was alive so he killed Uriah, it's wrong to fantasize about circumstances that would make someone else's spouse your own.

These are not trivial things, by the way. Paul says that this is idolatry. **Read 5**

We often think of idolatry as people in Asia bowing down to little jade trinkets or Buddha statues or the Greek gods. Paul says desiring things that are not yours to have is like bowing down to those things. It's worshipping another god altogether.

Why is that? Because part of true worship to God is being content and joyful for what he has given you. And it's being joyful for what he has not given you. It's delighting in his provision. He didn't give you a job that makes a lot of money - praise the Lord! He didn't give that person as a husband - praise the Lord! He's given you what he has given you for your good and for his glory. And he's not given you what you don't have for your good and for his glory.

So when we desire what other people have what we're actually doing is rejecting what God has given us. We're saying: God I think what you've given me in life is garbage. Or you're withholding something better that I deserve. God becomes this functional genie in a bottle where we're the one calling the shots. God becomes our slave and we become the master. That's idolatry.

There are people who are never content with what they have, never satisfied with what the Lord has given them, aren't even faithful with what he has given them and they always want more. They're the equivalent of a thankless little child that is never satisfied with what their parents provide, always complain about what they do provide and will never be happy. Paul says the wrath of God is coming on those people. **Read 6**

Here's the antidote to that: First, acknowledge our sinful heart and ask forgiveness. Wanting other people's things is sin. Second, we need to thank God for what he has given us. That often requires literally stopping and writing down the things God has blessed us with. Third, it's okay to ask God for things we don't have but might want. It's okay to want a bigger paycheck. It's okay to want a spouse. It's okay to ask God for things. But we need to be careful that we are humble and content in the mean time.

1 Tim. 6:8: If we have food and clothing with these we will be content.

Are we really content with food and clothes? God says he'll provide those. Are we okay with that?

Anything in our lives that is more than that is pure grace from our Lord. May we be thankful and praise him for those things.

Pray