

Colossians 3:7-8: Killing Sinful Desires - Part 2

This morning we are continuing in our look at Col. 3 where Paul has switched gears, as it were, from talking about what Jesus has done in saving those who trust in him alone for salvation to how we are to live in light of that. He's gone from the indicatives to the imperatives. The indicatives were in chapters 1 and 2 where he spent time talking about who we are in Jesus. That our identity is not in ourselves or our works, but through faith we are united with in Jesus. Now he's talking about the imperatives - how we now live out our salvation; the commands that guide our lives.

And there's a lot in this passage that can cause conviction of sin. We're basically going through a list of sins we are called to put to death in our lives.

A couple of things we need to say up front this morning. First, salvation is all by grace. Salvation is by grace alone though faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Salvation is not faith in Jesus plus never committing any sins again. When we do get caught up in sin, we are to remind ourselves of who we are in Christ, confess, repent and keep going.

Second, every believer will struggle with sin. Christians are not a group of self-proclaimed perfect people. Hopefully we're not a group of hypocrites, but we are a group of sinners saved by grace who desire to please Jesus with our lives. And we're all at different places on the narrow path to glory. Maybe you've overcome some sins that I haven't yet. Maybe I've conquered some sins you still struggle with. But, buckle up for a lifelong battle with sin because we won't conquer it this side of glory.

Jas. 3:2: We all stumble in many ways.

The Lord's brother James - an apostle - includes himself. He stumbles in many ways. Specifically, the context is stumbling in what we say. James says if we could just get rid of sinful speech we'd be perfect.

1 John 1:8-10: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Even the apostle John - the one whom Jesus loved - who wrote 50 chapters of the NT couldn't say he had no sin.

1 Tim. 1:15: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost.

Paul was very aware of his sinfulness. There is no complete deliverance from sin this side of heaven. There is no Christian perfection that can be attained in this life. So we're saved by grace. We'll never see perfection this side of glory.

But the third thing we need to keep in mind is that our lives are devoted to repentance, Lifelong repentance is part and parcel of the gospel message.

Acts 26:20: [Paul talking about the gospel message he preaches says he] declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

Martin Luther's 1st statement in his 95 Thesis was: Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, "Repent" intended that the whole life of his believers on earth should be constant repentance. Constant turning from sin.

If you were here for the morning Bible study last week, you remember that Andy mentioned that the gospel message we preach to has to include the message of repentance. It has to include a turning from the sin that Jesus saves us from. Repentance is not a work, it's not an action. But it is a change of mind about our sin that ultimately results in a life dedicated to ridding ourselves of sin.

There are some who think that Jesus can be their Savior without being their Lord. They think they can say a prayer and get to heaven without any sort of change in their life. On the contrary, the saving work of the Spirit in our lives is that we are not only saved from sin but begin a lifelong journey of joyfully obeying the Lord. And that can be hard.

Luke 14:25-33: Jesus says we need to count the cost of following him.

The cost is lifelong devotion to Christ as the Lord of our lives, placing him and his commands above all other things in this world, including our own desires. And part of that is putting our sinful desires to death. Christians are not those who simply confess our sin to God and then keep going on in our sin. No, we confess our sins and do everything we can to get rid of our sins. And that's what Paul is talking about here. **Read 5-7**

See, before we were saved, before we believed in Christ, Paul says we walked in these things. This was the course of our lives. We lived in them: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and the rest. That's just what we did. That's how we lived.

And that's how the world still lives. These things are just the way of life for many people. But it's this way of life, **Vs. 6** says, that is the reason the wrath of God is coming. **Read 6**

God is not indifferent to life on earth. God doesn't turn a blind eye to what happens in our lives. What happens in Vegas is judged by God in wrath.

And for every one of us who are believers, we were in that too. We walked in that, we lived in that. But now that we are in Christ we put all of that old life away. **Read 8**

So if we are united with Jesus, if our life is hidden with Christ in God, then this is how we are to live. We put these things away, we put them off, we put them to death.

So we have 5 more things that, if we are in Christ - if we are saved - we are to put to death.

1) If we are in Christ, we are to Kill Anger. **Read 8**

Now, because I know some of you are already thinking about it, let me just address righteous anger really quick and at the same time hopefully address the issue of anger. **Turn to Eph 4:26-27.**

If you're in a group of more than 3 people and you start talking about not being angry, you've always got that guy who brings up righteous anger. Righteous anger is the reality that anger, all on its own, does not have to be sinful. It doesn't have to express itself in sinful ways.

To some extent anger is just an emotion. And as an emotion sometimes it's a legitimate one. **Read 26-27**

So it seems like Paul is saying here that anger can be okay. We know that Jesus was often angry with the Pharisees, God is angry every day with the wicked, the Spirit can be outraged at unrepentant sin. So if God can be angry, it can't be sin.

And it seems like there's also some room for us to be angry as well where it's not sinful. We can be angry at injustice and sin and blasphemy. Ask any parent what kind of emotion they will feel if someone starts bullying their kid? It's anger. And rightly so.

But can we just be honest? Rarely is our anger righteous. Paul Tripp once asked: How much of your anger has anything to do with the Kingdom of God? And I think the answer is very little. In fact, even in this section Paul offers 3 warnings about being angry. **Read 26-27**

So the first warning is don't sin in your anger. The problem with anger is that rarely do we do anything constructive with it. We usually lash out with our words or actions. Give people the cold shoulder, retaliate, gossip about them. That's warning one.

Warning 2: We need to get over our anger quickly. Don't let the sun go down on our anger. If you've got this continual low-grade anger always going on I can assure you it's not righteous. Holding grudges, ignoring people, passive aggressive behavior, undermining, all of that isn't righteous. God calls us to reconcile, as much as it is possible, with people quickly. The sun going down is less than 24 hours.

Warning 3: Give no opportunity to the devil. **Read 27**

The bad part about anger is that if we're not careful it's the gateway to all kinds of other sinfulness. People steal and lie and manipulate and become lazy and bitter all because of anger. It's the gateway to being tempted and devoured by the devil.

Prov. 29:11: A fool gives full vent to his spirit - his anger.

Prov. 9:22: A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

Even within this context, Paul tells people to not be angry. **Read 31-32**

How can he say it's okay to be angry, on the one hand and then a few verses later say to put it away? Because he knows what most of us know: there's a very, very small window of righteous anger. The rest of it we need to put away.

I mentioned it in passing last week, but **turn** to **James 4:1-2**. I think it's helpful for us to look at the heart of anger for just a minute. I know we go to this verse fairly often, but we do so because it's so essential for knowing why we're mad. **Read 1-2**

Why do you freak out when your brother does something to you? Because your passions are at war. You desire something and you're not getting it. You desire peace and quiet and he's annoying you. Or you don't want something and you're getting it anyway.

This is where anger comes from: We're not getting our way. Someone is keeping us from it. And James says the result is that we want to murder them.

By the way, just a little confession: My particular sin when I was younger was a button pusher. I was an angry kid growing up and I knew the power of anger. So if I really wanted to get revenge on someone I'd push their buttons and let the anger do the work for me. I had a co worker many years ago who had a hair-trigger temper and when he'd start annoying me I'd start pushing buttons. It was like dropping a match in a barrel of gun powder. The guy would explode and be a mess all day.

You know what happened? One day I was reading through Matthew and Jesus was talking about making people sin. And he says it would be better to take a mill stone - a massive boulder - and tie around my neck and drown myself than to cause someone to sin. That's scary. If we're tempted to cause someone else to sin Jesus says it'd be better for us to kill ourselves. **Matt 18:5-6**

I speak to you who are brothers and sisters especially - because I've been there - do not tempt your siblings to anger. And don't fester in your anger either. Even if you believe you have been wronged, sometimes it's best to take it on the chin and move on.

2) **Turn** over to **Rom. 12:14-21**. The second thing we need to put away is Wrath.

To some extent, wrath and anger are synonyms. The NT often uses them interchangeably, so I won't spend a lot of time here. Maybe one distinction we could make is that anger is the internal response to a situation and wrath is the external response. I wouldn't die on that definition, but it's about the best distinction we might be able to make.

In Romans 12, just like Colossians 2, Paul has transitioned to how we are to live in light of all that he has said in the first 11 chapters. This is the imperative of Romans. And notice what he's talking about: our response to being wronged. Where James chided us for improperly responding to not getting what we want, Paul here talks about what our response should be. **Read 14-18**

These are all things that are difficult. Persecution usually makes us feel like getting even. Restricting freedom, rights, maybe even killing us as believers for no reason. What's our response? Bless those people.

He commands us to live in harmony with people which means that often there is dissonance. And we have to live at peace which means there's usually what? War. This is the course of life that we're called to. Then he says this in **18-21**.

This is why I said I think wrath is more of the outward expression of anger. Avenging someone is taking retribution into our own hands. We are to leave that up to God. The Church is not a band of morally pure vigilantes that know the real way that vengeance should be exacted. No, we trust that God has established the justice system we have to punish the evil doer and even if the person gets away in this life, he will stand before the Lord in judgment. And we have to trust that.

Side: This is in light of the conviction of Larry Nassar, the Olympic Gymnastic doctor who was convicted recently for abusing ladies on the US Olympic gymnastics team. The first lady who came forward was a Christian woman who was marginalized by her church. She was told that she should forgive and just let bygones be bygones. No need to pursue legal action.

She didn't believe that and I neither do I. Beloved, part of trusting God's vengeance is to utilize the legal system that God has established for justice. Part of what the government should do is render God's wrath.

Read 13:1-4

Do you understand that we are not the judge, jury and executioner? We are not tasked to take out wrath on those who wring us. But God has established judges, juries, and even executioners for the purpose of justice and executing his wrath and we can trust him to ultimately bring those who wrong us to justice.

We don't take out wrath because God has already established ways that wrath should happen. And ultimately we can trust God's wrath in the future.

3) **Turn** back to Col. 3 and we'll look at the next thing we put to death: Malice. **Read 7**

Now, these next 3 are sort of grouped as well. They have to do with the mouth. Malice, in general, is just evil talk aimed at hurting others. It could be putting people down. It could be joking in a way to injure people. It could be sarcasm.

By the way: be very, very careful with sarcasm. Very rarely does sarcasm ever build anyone up. If you're witty and funny and clever, I get that sarcasm can be fun. But sarcasm is like juggling razor blades. Maybe it's really funny if done right, but we can do a lot of damage in a very short amount of time and not even realize it.

And by the way, I'm not talking about correcting people. The Bible calls us to rebuke and exhort people. That means telling them they're wrong. That's okay when done in love.

What this is talking about is speaking in a way to do damage to someone else. We need to put that away.

4) We need to Kill Slander. **Read 5**

Slander is basically speaking evil about someone when they are not there. The Gk word is where we get our word blasphemy. When we think of blasphemy we usually think of people saying things that dishonor God. But in a broad sense blasphemy is just speaking evil of anyone, other people included. And that's the idea here.

And where malice is more tearing a person down to their face, slander is more estroying their reputation while talking to other people. An older word is defamation. If making someone famous is talking someone up when they are not present, defamation is talking them down when they're not present. That's what this is.

And we're all guilty of this. We've all passed along information we shouldn't, we've all criticized people unfairly in their absence. And we've all listened to other people do the same thing. Is there a place where we can talk to people soberly about a particular situation without falling into gossip? Sure, but I think just like righteous anger there's a pretty narrow window.

Let me give you some examples of slander just so we cover our bases here:

It could be passing along information that's not true - lying about other people.

It could be telling only half of the story, leaving out a critical part so that the person looks bad.

It also doesn't even have to be words, it could be the tone of our voice or insinuations in our conversations.

It could even be telling the complete truth about someone, but that you have no business telling other people. Just because we've heard something or seen something doesn't mean everyone in our lives needs to know about it.

Prov. 11:13: Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.

If someone has told us something in confidence and then we go around telling other people, that's slander. Now, obviously there are some things we should not keep secret: abuse, crime, those sorts of things. But I think what Solomon is getting at in Proverbs is that parting of being a friend is simply keeping our mouths shut when people tell us important things.

One of things we are called to do is build one another up. When someone's name comes up in conversation and we're not there, our gut reaction should be to speak as well of them as we can. Whether it's someone we know or we don't know. The old saying is if you don't have something nice to say, don't say it at all is very much a Christian principle.

I want to give a few exceptions here because there are situations where we should expose evil and that is not slander. 1) False teachers: in both the NT and OT false teachers are spoken of - by name - in some of the harshest terms. You can read **Jude** or **2 Pet. 2** to get an idea.

2) Sinful situations that require explanation to carry out the **Matt. 18** disciplinary process. If you are going to get some witnesses to address a brother or sister you've already talked to, it's probably good that they at least have a summary of the situation. And if it ends up going before the whole church, the church will need at least some explanation of the situation.

3) Legal situations where things have happened that require explanation. If we are talking about crimes that have been committed, it's not slander to tell police or whoever the specifics of what has happened.

There are likely other exceptions, but the general rule is that we need to guard our mouths.

5) We need to Kill Obscene Talk. **Read 8**

Some of you have abusive speech or filthy speech or something along those lines. Filthiness is really more the idea here.

So we're really talking about swearing - as in cuss words. Four letter words, colorful language, or whatever you want to call it. None of this has any place at all in the life of believers.

Eph. 4:29: Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.

Eph. 5:4: Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

There was a pastor over in Seattle for many years who had the reputation as the cussing pastor. He thought somehow Seattle was such a rough and tough city that in order for people to understand the gospel he had to swear in order to get his point across. And that's a total sham. Jesus never had to do that. Paul never had to do that. The apostles never had to do that. Instead they commanded just the opposite. Why? Because we are called to be salt and light and one of the biggest ways we do that is through our speech.

And I think we know this - that we shouldn't swear - but we need to remind ourselves of it. I know I do. Swearing was something I did quite a lot before I was a believer and was one of the first things I had to begin killing in my life. And I'll tell you, it's something I still have to repent from. And there are times when I say things that are probably borderline that, if I'm just being honest, I need to put to death as well. I have this fear that one day I'll have dementia and somehow I'll unknowingly return to the swearing of my past in my latter years.

This also means "Christian swearing" is out. Where we just substitute words for the words we really want to use. I have a friend who is not a believer, but wants to be moral, and he fake swears more than some truckers I know.

Talking about body parts and body functions in a way that is dishonorable to the Lord falls into this category. Parents, part of our job is to teach our kids what to say and what not to say. And for all of us there should be no obscene talk.

Because we are in Christ, we are defined by Jesus, this is how he has called us to live. We are to put these all away.

If you're still struggling with some of these - don't give up! Don't give up the struggle. It took me 4 years to stop swearing on a regular basis and probably 10 more to stop thinking about swearing on a regular basis. We're in this fight for the long haul. Sometimes the Lord delivers people out of a sin quickly after they are saved and praise God for that. But most of the time it's a long, process of killing sin.

You know what I think that does? It forces us to remember that we need God's grace just as much today as the day we were first saved. And praise him that he gives it to us freely.

Pray