

“Put off the Old-self”

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

What are you searching for in life? Why are you here? What kind of person are you at your core? These questions and many others like them are called existential questions. You can think about them as the “big questions” about the meaning of life. They strike at the heart of who we are as human beings. I wonder if you ever think about these things. Do you ever wonder what your purpose in life is? Do you ever think about what makes you you? If you think about these kinds of questions often it would probably surprise you to realize that a lot of people never think about the “big questions” of life. On the other hand, if these big questions do not seem important to you, you’re probably wondering why some people get so worked up by questions that do not seem to have answers. After all, we do not have a specifically written mandate from the Lord telling us exactly why he made us and for what purpose. It is revealed plainly in the Word of God that all humans are made for the glory of God, but how you will do that is likely different than the person sitting next to you. In the end you may not spend much time thinking about these questions, but we all at some point ponder our future. Even if it is not an esoteric or existential way, you likely find yourself wondering what kind of job you want, or where you might want to live.

So I ask again, what are you searching for in life? What are you chasing after? You might choose to answer these questions either with an eye to deeper meaning, or you might think about practical things. But in either case, how you answer and even more importantly how you arrived at your answer is what I want you to think about. The point that I am driving at here is that we all have desires and aspirations. We all have goals and dreams. However, where did these things come from?

I suggest to you that it is very important for us to consider how we think about ourselves and what we are chasing in life. In Colossians 3:5-11, the Apostle Paul called the Colossians to turn from their sinful lives because they belonged to Christ. What is interesting to me is that Paul calls for the Colossians to put off the old self and to put on the new self. Calling for the putting off of the old and putting on of the new begs a question: is there something wrong with who we were before we became Christians? At the core of who we were and what we wanted from life, was there something wrong with us?

I think answering these questions is complicated. First of all, I think we can say that our basic desires are things that God himself put into human nature. You don’t have to be a Christian to think that living in safety, having someone to love, and a way to support yourself is important. On the other hand, the things that get prioritized among sinful humanity is what is so at odds with Christ.

In other words, all of our passions and desires should come under the influence of Christ when we become Christians, but we don't lose our passions and desires. Our answers to the practical questions in life and the "big questions" get remade in the image of the Triune God. Why are you here? What should you do with your life? Who should you marry? Where should you live? What kind of work should you desire? All of these questions and more all still need to be answered by the Christian, but the way you arrive at an answer and the answers you give should show the imprint of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In our text today, there are two distinct parts of Paul's argument. Firstly, in verses 5-9, Paul expands on what could be characterized as our old nature (reread Col 3:5-9).

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

There are two lists of sins. The first is in verse 5 and the other is in verses 8-9. Later in Colossians 3:17, Paul refers to sins of word and deed. That description seems to fit here too. In verse 5, there are sins of deed. Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness. Paul then adds a bonus summary description of these sinful actions. He says that covetousness is idolatry, though I think we can extend the phrase "which is idolatry" to be connected to more than just covetousness. This is a bit easier to see in the Japanese translation of this passage. Paul says that 貪欲は偶像礼拝です。The thing of particular interest to us is that in the list of sins there are three with "欲"—including 貪欲, which is said to be idolatry. The point is that these sins are connected at their core. These sinful actions do not just happen. We aren't innocent bystanders of our sinful acts. They come from within us. The focus of these sins is inherently on ourselves. Not only are the actions themselves sinful, but they spring from a desire to prioritize ourselves over all other things. This is what is meant by idolatry. Worshipping false gods is the normal way we think about idolatry, but prioritizing our desires over the will of God is a form of self-worship. Who is really in charge of your life? In an ultimate sense, God is in charge, but when we put our own desires above the law of God we are challenging God's rule. God really hates idolatry. The Old Testament says over and over again that God is a jealous God. Normally jealousy is a bad thing because our jealousy is usually related to a feeling that other people have more than they deserve or that we deserve to have the same things as other people. However, with God it is a completely different situation. God is worthy to be praised. So when we lift up ourselves to compete with God, Colossians

3:6 says "On account of these the wrath of God is coming."

So Paul calls for the Colossians to kill these sinful actions. This is such a violent expression that it probably seems out of place. Why would we want to kill anything? However, when you consider that God's wrath is coming on the world because of sin, you can quickly understand why Paul is saying that Christians need to get rid of these things. Paul says that the Colossians "too once walked" in these sinful actions. They were part of the world and so they did as the world did. But now they should kill these things. They need to stamp them out. Eradicate them.

Now to the sinful actions Paul adds verses 8-9 (reread verses 8-9).

8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

In these verses, Paul is looking at the ways we speak. To combat these sinful words, Paul says we should throw away or get rid of them. He says that we should not only put off the old self with its actions, but also put off a lying tongue and all the other wicked ways that we can treat one another with our words. Paul's aim in all of this should be clear to us. In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul says that Christians should have their eyes focused on things above—which means that they should be directing their lives toward God. If our lives are directed toward God it would be quite difficult to imagine us going back to things that call down God's wrath. The call that is placed on Christians to put off and to kill off these sinful desires makes perfect sense, but it brings us back to the questions we started with. If Christians are supposed to kill off our old sinful desires, what does that mean for the other things we desired? How much were your life plans influenced by sinful desires?

Well that depends on the desired thing I suppose, but one thing we must see: we need to think deeply about the things that we want out of life. When we became Christians, we were brought out of death and into life. We were in bondage (slavery) to sin. It dominated us. However, now that we have received new life in Christ by grace through faith, we are free. But we are not free to go back to the things that condemned us before. Our plans for our lives should come under the influence of Christ. The plans we have for our lives should be considered in light of these fundamental truths: that we are God's children, salt and light in the world, and ambassadors of the King of Glory. All other plans shine but dimly compared to the surpassing glory of our Lord. And as we will see when we look at how Christians do that in verses 12-17, we will see that there is great freedom for how one might do that. However, here we can say that by killing off our sinful desires, the aspirations of our lives get recast into a different mold. That mold is one that reflects the deep change that has taken place in our lives.

At the end of verse 9, Paul says that the old self is put off and in verse 10 he says that we put on the new self, "which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Our knowledge and desires are being renewed. I think this is an important part of Paul's argument. He does not say that we should already be fully conformed or renewed, but that we are being renewed. This renewal comes in the form of new knowledge. The truths of the gospel and the Word of God are glorious and life-changing. As we put off the old and try to understand the things revealed by God, our minds are renewed. But note that the renewal has a specific shape. Our minds are renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator. That is why I have labored to show the connection between the goals and desires we have for our lives in this sermon. The mind/heart of the Christian is remade into the image of the Savior. Now in the forefront of Paul's mind is the relationships of Christians in the church.

In verse 11 Paul says, in Christ "there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian,

Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." The big things that we use to identify ourselves and to fit ourselves into the world lose their potency to divide us in Christ. The big cultural and spiritual divides, as well as our social standing, do not hold sway over our identity as Christians. One of the things that makes Paul's point here so powerful is that Jewish people would have viewed associations with non-Jewish people as something that would tarnish their purity. It was unlawful for them to eat alongside a Gentile, or even to spend long amounts of time with them. For most Jews the divide between Jew and Gentile is too wide to cross. What Paul is suggesting then is that, in Christ, all the things that separate people from one another fall away because everyone in Christ comes under the name and protection of Jesus. Christ is all and in all. The way we live our lives and the thing we are chasing in life is centered on one person, the Lord Jesus.

So how can I really say that we do not lose ourselves and our identities when we become Christians? That is an important question. All of our minds are being renewed after the image of our Creator, but we are not starting at the same place nor do we all have the same calling in life. The best way I can explain this is by reminding you of the way the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible. The vocabulary, grammar, writing style, and genres are present in the Bible because there are around 40 different human authors. But the fact remains that the testimony of the Bible itself is that it is God's Word. The inspiration of the biblical books is something that is absolutely vital, but in the use of human authors God did not crush the individual. So if in something so high and so precious God did not eliminate the personality of the biblical authors, how much more likely is it that God would allow us to pursue many different paths in our Christian lives? To me it seems so natural. When God planted the garden in Eden, he did not tell Adam to build a temple to worship God in. God had already built the sanctuary after all. He told Adam to multiply and fill the earth. He told him to subdue the creatures and to care for the earth. Our callings and gifts are different because we are not all made to do the same job. This is true in the church and in the world. As we pursue our aspirations and use our gifting to provide for our physical needs, we need to see that the Christian life should have an increasing awareness of the Savior. In other words, everything that we do should have a tinge of worship. Everything that we desire to do and whatever we end up doing should be done with our eyes directed to heaven. However, when we seek to fulfill our sinful desires we are really putting our will against God's will. By pitting our will against God, we are being idolatrous. It may seem right to indulge ourselves like this, but sin deceives us. It promises pleasure, power, and profit, but what it really brings is pain. It breaks our relationship with God and with the people around us. The temporary pleasure and gain from sin is always spoiled by the ways that it makes us despise the common grace of God in our lives as well as create suspicion in our relationships with other people. Sinful desires lie to us and never deliver what they promise. However, we are so used to listening to those inner promptings that we have to be called to change our ways.

The call that Paul is making here is very unnatural for us. We were born in sin and without proper instruction it is all we have ever known. So we need the grace of God in our lives to put to death what is earthly in us. We need the renewal of our minds after the image of Jesus to put off the all the sinful ways we speak to one another. We must have the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to trust that God's way is better than the ways of the world.

Sin is ever crouching at the door. It is waiting to spring on us and to overrun us. However, the person who sets their eyes on things above where Christ is has something to anchor them to truth. So whether you work, marry, study, or retire you have a different vision for your life. Our main focus is not on what we can get from life, though undoubtedly we will get much out of life. Our main focus is on the name and glory of our Savior.

In Matt 6:33, Jesus puts it like this: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31)