

## Colossian 3:1-17

- In 3:3-4 Paul says that we have died and our lives are *hidden* with Christ in God. By contrast, world looks at you as middle-aged parents who are making ends meet, but aren't unusually attractive or rich or accomplished and will never be famous or make a lasting mark on the world. To the world you are growing old while your influence on even your circle of average acquaintances wanes. You can be proud of your modest accomplishments, but honestly, how special are you? In the eyes of the world, not at all.

Describe who you, and we, are in Christ. Describe the life you have hidden that one but other Christians knows about. Describe the you, and the us, which is waxing while the life everyone else sees is waning. Describe "Christ in you, the hope of glory," not with false modesty, but with the truth that is in Christ, and that is meant to sustain you in the corrosive environment of this fallen world.

Following Emily's suggestion, what verses have you found which help answer this question?

- In this passage Paul lists three sets of five:

<b>Put to death</b>	<b>Get rid of</b>	<b>Clothe yourself in</b>
Fornication	Anger	Compassion
Impurity	Wrath	Kindness
Passion <sup>1</sup>	Malice	Humility
Evil desire	Slander	Meekness
Greed	Abusive language	Patience
<i>This is the way you once lived; on account of this God's wrath is coming</i>	<i>Do not lie</i>	<i>Bear with one another; forgive; love</i>

The five to be put to death center on our sexuality. (Wright believes the final "greed", while a general term, carries overtones of sexual hunger or avarice because of the context.)

- What common theme connects the second group of five?
  - Churches tend to focus on one of these categories (sexual sin v. sins related to slander and discord) and not give as much attention to the other. Which does our church tend to put more energy into resisting?
- In chapter 2 Paul condemns the Jewish ascetics for their rules of "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch" (2:21). As David C. asked last time, how are Paul's first two fives (put to death, get rid of) any different?
  - To "put to death" various sexual sins Paul describes we must not only avoid sinful actions; we must also avoid offering hospitality to the fantasies and idle thoughts which lead to them. As Wright puts

<sup>1</sup> This is *pathos*, which in Paul's usage (Rom 1:26; 1 Thess 4:5) refers to a "shameful passion which leads to sexual excesses" (O'Brien, 182).

it, temptation is one thing; quite another is “when the idea of illicit gratification, presented to the mind in temptation, is not at once put to death, but is instead fondled and cherished” (Wright 134). When we do this we fall under the shadow, then the influence and eventually the control of an idol, and according to Rom 6:21 this leads to nothing short of spiritual death. Wright goes on to say,

To put something to death you must cut off its lines of supply: it is futile and self-deceiving to bemoan one's inability to resist the last stage of a temptation when earlier stages have gone by unnoticed, or even eagerly welcomed. This does not mean setting up a new hedge around the law, such as branding all theatrical performances (or whatever) as inherently ‘sinful’. Rather, every Christian has the responsibility, before God, to investigate the lifelines of whatever sins are defeating him personally, and to cut them off without pity. Better that than have them eventually destroy him. (135)

Paul’s direction to “put to death” these sins isn’t simply a matter of applying Holy-Spirit empowered will power. It *is* that, but it is also more than that. For instance, Paul advises the Colossian *admonish* one another (3:16), being willing to lovingly (3:14) and in a spirit of forgiveness and forbearance (3:13) name sin for what it is. What other practical advice for putting these sins to death (and getting rid of the others) can you find in 3:1-17?<sup>1</sup> (I count ten, but may have missed some.)

5. Studies suggest that there is a segment of our congregation—predominantly men, but also women—who regularly view or read pornography. An even larger segment of our congregation doesn’t consume pornography but nevertheless indulges in simple, secret fantasies. Focusing first not on pornography but on the “impurity, passion and evil desire” which can lead to “fornication,” what practical steps can we take to help members of our church “cut the supply lines” of these secret fantasies (see Question 4)? If a younger Christian approached you for advice along these lines, what would you suggest?
6. Pornography and sexual addiction are blight not just on secular America, but on the church as well. These sins cost jobs and even shatter families if not addressed. In recent years, several ministries have had success in addressing these problems, relying particularly upon openness, radical accountability, and a recognition of one’s helplessness to tackle the problem alone. What should we be doing to identify and rescue those in our midst who are held captive by pornography and sexual addiction?
7. Paul warns in 3:6 of God’s wrath on the disobedient. Paul also refer elsewhere to God’s love for the unsaved (Eph 2:4-5). At first glance this paints for us a God who somehow manages to feel both fiery anger and the deepest of love for the unsaved. Eduard Lohse suggests this is a misunderstanding of the way “wrath” is used in verses like this one: “The concept ‘wrath’ (*orgay*) does not indicate an emotion of God... Rather, *orgay* is God’s judgment of wrath which befalls all sinful and evil actions of men...”<sup>2</sup> Read 1 Thess 1:10; 2:16; Rom 5:9; Luke 3:7. Is Lohse finding something which isn’t there in the text?
8. Three times Paul tells the Colossians to clothe themselves in the Christ-like virtue which belongs to their new selves. This language calls to mind the practice in the early Church of giving converts white clothing following their baptism. The idea of deliberately acting in the manner of what you to become

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<sup>2</sup> *Colossians and Philemon* (Fortress, 1971), 139.

is found not just here, but in such diverse areas as treats for alcoholism and depression and fostering confidence for job interviews.

Visualizing and imitating Christ, whom you have never met in person, can be challenging. Imitating an older sister or brother in the Lord who particularly embodies Christ-likeness is another way to achieve the same result. Who do you know and admire whom you can imitate when trying to live out of your new self in Christ?

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*Fun fact:* "...several of the so-called virtues in the NT lists [of virtues, such as in Colossians 3] were regarded as vices in Stoicism. So, for example, 'humility' was a term of opprobrium in Greek thought..." (O'Brien, 179)

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<sup>i</sup> **Spoiler alert:** (1) deliberately focus on "the things above" (3:2); (2) "clothe yourself" (3:12), i.e., "fake it til you [empowered by the Holy Spirit] make it"—deliberately pretend to be who you want to become; (3) change is about *attitude*, so start there (3:5, 8, 12, 14, 15); (4) "put to death" (3:5), i.e. make a clean break with sin rather than trying to gradually wean yourself; (5) immerse yourself in the Word (3:16); (6) *teach* one another (do we take seriously teaching and preaching which doesn't just inspire, but also *educates*?) (3:16); (7) *admonish* one another (accountability relationships and preaching and teaching which convict) (3:16); (8) foster a thankful attitude (3:16); (9) use worship! (3:16); take seriously what you do so that *everything* is to be done in the name of Jesus (3:17); (10) make forgiveness and forbearance priorities—who do you need to bury the hatchet with? (3:18).