

Colossians 3

FIVE TO PUT TO DEATH (3:5-7)

1. Studies suggest that there is a segment of our congregation—predominantly men, but also women—who regularly view or read pornography. 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. An even larger segment of our congregation doesn't consume pornography but nevertheless indulges in simple, secret fantasies which still constitute what Paul refers to as "impurity, passion and evil desire".
 - a. What practical steps can we take to help members of our church "cut the supply lines" (as Wright puts it) of these secret fantasies?
 - b. What can we do to help those of us held captive by pornography and sexual addiction?
2. 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 a God who feels 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..."¹ Read 1 Thess 1:10; 2:16; Rom 5:9; Luke 3:7. Is Lohse finding something which isn't in the text?
3. 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 is found in other contexts, such as treatment for alcoholism and depression and fostering confidence.

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. Whom do you know and admire whom you can imitate when trying to live out of your new self in Christ?

ON C. S. LEWIS' *THE LUNCH AND THE SERMON*² AND PAUL'S HOUSEHOLD CODE (3:18-4:1)

4. The vicar speaks in his sermon of the importance of the home for character, national life, etc. Lewis knows the vicar's home life is nothing like the sanctuary he is describing in his sermon, but says that isn't what bothers him. What, in fact, is?
5. Lewis ends his second observation with this: "Some of those who say (and almost with pride) that they live only for love come, at last, to live in incessant resentment." What does he mean?

1 *Colossians and Philemon* (Fortress, 1971), 139.

2 *Undeceptions* (Geoffrey Bles, London, 1971), pp. 233-7.

6. In his fourth observation Lewis writes,

If a man can't be comfortable and unguarded, can't take his ease and 'be himself' in his own house, where can he? That is, I confess, the trouble. The answer is an alarming one. There is nowhere this side of heaven where one can safely lay the reins on the horse's neck. It will never be lawful simply to 'be ourselves' until 'ourselves' have become sons of God.

Have you experienced what Lewis describes, that despite the ways in which home differs from general society, it's still no place for simply "being yourself"? Even for those who have stable or happy homes, Advent and Christmas can evoke a deep melancholy. How (if at all) does this relate to the life-long exile from heart's true home which Lewis describes?

7. In Lewis' final point he writes,

...must we not teach that if the home is to be a means of grace it must be a place of rules? There cannot be a common life without a *regula*. The alternative to rule is not freedom but the unconstitutional (and often unconscious) tyranny of the most selfish member.

Paul presents a *regula* for the Christian home in 3:18-4:1. Household codes such as Paul's were a common way for both Greeks and Hellenistic Jews to answer the question, How do we then live? Like Paul's advice, the Greek rules also stressed reciprocity between those in charge and those beneath them, and their advice was generally that those in charge rule wisely and compassionately and those not in charge obey and honor.

Paul's code differs from secular codes because (a) he addresses the wives, slaves and children on the same terms as the husbands, parents and masters; (b) "although it was assumed that husbands should love their wives, ancient household codes never list love as a husband's duty; such codes told husbands only to make their wives submit"³; (c) Paul puts his advice in the context of service of Jesus, whom they fear (22) and serve (24); and (d) in addressing slaves, Paul refers (24) to the "inheritance" believers will receive, standing in contrast to Roman law which prevented slaves from inheriting.

How well does Paul's household address the need Lewis identifies? From your experience, how would flesh out Paul's brief list of advice?

8. Paul tells wives to be subject to their husbands, and husbands to love their wives (3:18). Christians in modern times have wondered whether, like the parent-child advice, this represents a timeless pattern to be followed, or like the advice to slaves and masters, is advice on how to live within a fallen cultural construct. Here are eight observations which may be helpful:

- **Language:** "Be subject" (*hypotasso*) means to subject one's self, be subjected or subordinated, to obey; it refers to submission "involving recognition of an ordered structure" (BDAG). The word is used in the NT of subjection to parents, husbands, civil authorities, God, church authorities, the will of God, and the Law. It is the same word Paul uses for Jesus' submission to the Father (1 Cor 11:3; 15:28).

3 Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Eph 5:22-24).

- **Language:** Paul says wives should submit to their husbands, “as is fitting in the Lord.” “It is fitting” (*to aneken*), “indicates what is proper, one’s duty” (Lohse, 158).
- **Context:** Husbands were normally older than their wives, often by over a decade in Greek culture (with men frequently marrying around age thirty and women in their teens, often early teens; cf. IVP’s *Bible Background Commentary*).
- **Context:** Unlike in Jewish culture, a woman remained under the legal authority of her father even after marriage unless specific steps were taken to sever this relationship.
- **Interpretation (historical):** Like Aristotle and other ancient philosophers (including Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus), Augustine saw this injunction as reflecting a pattern found in the natural world.⁴ Chrysostom, on the other hand, explicitly says it’s *not* a reflection of natural order and is intended to reduce conflict in marriage.
- **Interpretation:** “Paul’s own fellow-workers included women, and married couples, where it appears that the women were, in our phrase, ‘people in their own right’ rather than shadowy figures screened from view by a bossy husband” (Wright Lite, 186).
- **Interpretation:** At times like this we might wish we could talk to Paul face to face and ask him to expand on these few verses. In fact, Paul’s done just that in Ephesians 5! The main additions in the Ephesians version are the initial verse, 5:21: “Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ”, and the clarification that the marriage relationship is meant to mirror Christ’s relationship with the Church (5:22-28).
- **Interpretation:** Modern psychological research bears out differences between the genders which may well be physiological rather than cultural (see Meilaender reference in footnote 4).

Do you think Paul’s advice to husbands and wives applies to us as well? Have you always held the view you do on this topic? Is this advice primarily about breaking the rare tie in marital disputes, or are the implications deeper?

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Fun quote: Augustine was all for husbands loving wives, just not their wives’ inner “desperate housewives”: “God forbid that a man who possesses faith should, when he hears the apostle bid men ‘love their wives’, love that disordered sexual desire in his wife which he ought not to love even in himself. He may know this if he listens to the words of another apostle, ‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world’” (from his *Marriage and Concupiscence*).

4 “Nor can it be doubted that it is more consonant with the order of nature that men should bear rule over women than women over men.” Some modern thinkers, such as C. S. Lewis and Helmut Thieleke, see a biological difference between the sexes as the basis for a reciprocal marital relationship. Gilbert Meilaender compares Lewis’ and Thieleke’s views, as well as that of Dorothy Sayers, in his essay “Marriage in Counterpoint and Harmony,” in his collection *Things That Count*.