

Colossians 3:5-11

Paul has finished his theological portion of the letter that focused on attacking the false philosophies that had crept into the Christian teaching in Colossae and his presentation of True Christology and Soteriology (Christ and salvation)

How does a Christian “seek the things above” and “set the mind on the things above? Here the answer involves not seeking and doing the things of the earth by *putting to death* and *putting away* the old, sinful practices and *putting on* the new virtues. Notice seeking and thinking about things above does NOT involve visions, emotions and mystical experiences! This was the practice of the vain philosophies in Colossae.

Four key phrases from early Church catechesis begin the following paragraphs of thought:

- “put to death” (3:5)
- “put on” (3:12)
- “be subject” (3:18)
- “watch and pray” (4:2)

(Romans 6:11-7:6; Romans 8:11-18)

3:5 –

“Therefore” – (oun) Paul builds on the previous words which were to focus and desire Christ and the “things above” (not mystical, magical stuff, but things of God’s nature and God’s ways.)

“Put to death” – this is based on the previously stated fact that “you have died.” So, now bring your actions in line. These things have already been stated to be true:

- 1) We have been delivered from the dominion of darkness (1:13)
- 2) We participate in Christ’s death (2:11-12)
- 3) God has already disarmed the rulers and authorities. Jesus has already triumphed over them (2:14-15)
- 4) In this scenario we are told in the imperative (mood of command) to “put to death”
- 5) We hear the same attitude in Romans 6:6-7 and 6:11-12, “...*therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*”

“earthly” – these are the things of the earth, the earthly things or the things that are NOT “things above.”

The first 5 of the 10 vices listed by Paul deal with sexual sin.

- a) sexual immorality, **porneia**, any sex outside of marriage. This is any unrestrained sexual behavior. Associated with idol worship in the OT (Isaiah 47:10; Jer. 3:9; Ezek.23:8; Mic. 1:7) This was a new virtue to the ancient world, specifically to the Greek/Roman world.
- b) impurity, Phillips paraphrased NT translates this as “dirty-mindedness. in the OT this was manifest in two ways: 1) Ceremonially impure concerning ritual worship; 2) sexual immorality. Paul uses impurity to refer to sexual immorality in Rom. 1:24; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal.5:19
- c) passion, **pathos**, (“lust”) here it refers to lust and uncontrolled shameful passions. The focus is again on domination of a person by sexual desires and sexual drive. Paul uses this to refer to the behavior of “the pagans who do not know God in 1 Thes. 4:5 and Rom. 1:26.
- d) evil desire, **epithumian kaken**, used to refer to: 1) general sinful desires (Rom. 6:12; 7:8; 13:14; Gal. 5:16) ; 2) illicit sexual desires (Rom. 1:24; 1 Thes. 4:5)
- e) greed, **pleonexian**, **pleion**= “more” and **echein**= “to have”, desire to have more. This could lead to the next statement – “which is idolatry” – in this case to have more spiritual insight and more revelation than what the Lord gave. Thus, in context, mysticism is idolatry. Or, if it stays with the theme of sexual sin, to want more sex in illicit ways is idolatry.

... “which is idolatry”, anything that interferes with our relationship with God, his Spirit, the life and it’s source of power “is idolatry” because it gets in the way of allowing God’s nature and our new life to flow, grow and show.

- this first list of vices ends with a description of the vices in the list as being “idolatry”

- the second list of six vices below also ends with a description of the list of vices: sins “from your lips” or “from your mouth.

3:6 –

“On account of these”

“the wrath of God” – this was an OT concept Zeph. 1:14-15

“is coming” –

- 1) Paul spoke of the wrath of God being revealed in time or in his own day as in Romans 1:18-32, “The wrath of God IS being revealed from heaven.....”
- 2) Paul also spoke of the wrath of God being revealed at the end of time at the final judgment:
 - a. Romans 2:5 – “because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”
 - b. Romans 5:9 - “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”
 - c. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 – “...and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”
 - d. Romans 2:7-8
- 3) In light of Paul having just spoken about the day Christ’s glory is revealed it is fitting that Paul is talking about the pouring out of God’s wrath in the final judgment.

3:7 –

“once walked” – the old practices and old nature

“when you were living in them.” – the old life and life source

- the once/now contrast as seen in Colossians 1:21; 1:22; 2:13 is presented as in Eph.4 –

See stages of revisionism from Ephesians

Paul’s focus here is to compare their NEW life to their OLD life which has died in Christ

This means they need to live in the NEW way and “put to death” the OLD ways.

3:8 –

“you must put them all away” – **apothesthe** means “to get rid of” and can be used to mean putting away or taking off clothes. This word, **apothesthe**, is used with the contrasting verb **enduo** to mean “to put on” in:

- a) Romans 13:12-14, “So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light... not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.
- b) Eph. 4:22-25 – “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”
 - this second list uses the word **ta panta** translated “all”
 - imperative mood, the mood of command

These next five vices focus on our relationship with others in society, family, church, etc.

The phrase “from your mouth” is interpreted in two basic ways:

- 1) Applying to two sins of the mouth: slander and obscene talk
- 2) Applying to the entire list. This means this is a list of sins or manifestations of the sin nature through the mouth: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk.

It appears that “from your mouth” modifies this entire list.

The writing of James in James 3:1-6 focuses on the sins of the mouth manifesting the inner sin nature.

- f) Anger- **orge** – emotions of hatred, focused on the inner man
- g) Wrath – **thumos** – an outburst of passion, focused on the outer action (**orge** and **thumos** or anger and wrath are virtually synonyms in the NT
- h) Malice – **kakia** – evil attitude that manifests in evil actions towards others. This is a vicious mind that will manifest in slanderous speech
- i) slander – **blasthemia** – is blasphemy against God (Matt. 12:31; Luke 5:21; John 10:33; Rev. 13:1, 5-6) but is slanderous speech when spoke against others (Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:22; Eph. 4:31; 1 Tim. 6:4). Of course, James says that to speak against men is to speak against God himself in James 3:9.
- j) obscene talk – **aischrologia** – similar to Ephesians 5:4 where the word **aischrotes**, “obscenity”, is used. But, this would seem to be obscenity in the form of abusive language towards people. Thus, language that breaks unity and prevents peace in society, family and the community of believers.

3:9 –

- k) do not lie – this is the opposite of truth. Since we are a people of Truth there is no place for lying or deception in our new behavior or language. In Romans 1:25 “lie” contrasts with “truth” and in that context “truth” is reality and the “lie” is a false reality, false philosophy, false god, false religion:

“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.” – Romans 1:25

“you have put off the old man”
“with its practices”

3:10 –

“have put on the new self”

- image of clothing is used where earlier Paul used the image of circumcision
- the verb is aorist tense which indicates this event has already happened. Meaning, their identity has already changed, but their behavior needs to be brought in line with the new reality, new life, new nature, new kingdom, new power, new life source. (Romans 6:1-14; Ephesians 4:17-5:1)

“being renewed in knowledge”

- this is present tense which means this transformation in our lives is occurring now and is an ever occurring process in our lives.

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“after the image of its creator”

3:11 –

Vice/Virtue Lists

- Vices listed in the NT: Rom. 1:25-31; 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; Eph. 5:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; 6:4-5; 1 Pet.4:3
 - Virtues listed in the NT: 2 Cor. 6:6-7; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:2-3; Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:2
 - The best the OT has to compare to this is Prov. 6:17-19; Jer. 7:9; Hosea 4:2 and even the Ten Commandments
 - In Greek/Roman culture of the NT times the literature and philosophers had developed vice/virtue lists that may have given form to the NT style seen here in Colossians
 - The four cardinal virtues of Hellenism promoted by the stoic philosophers were: wisdom, manliness, self-control, righteousness.
 - The corresponding vices were also four in number: folly, cowardice, intemperance, injustice
 - But, it is interesting to note that never are the four Hellenistic vices repeated in the NT lists.
 - And, Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit is unique and not duplicated in secular philosophy of his day.
 - It may be that Paul and the NT writers develop their list with help from the Old Testament.
 - Consider that Leviticus taught sexual morality and addressed anger, wrath, malice, love in the holiness Code found in Leviticus 17-26.
 - The writing and teaching of the Qumran community may also have helped develop the concept of lists.
 - If Paul is developing OT ideas with these two lists in Colossians 3:5-10, we can see his use of the Ten Commandments (idolatry) and the Leviticus Holiness Code which basically tells the Colossians to reject the false teaching (idolatry) and its immorality and pursue the character of God, who is their Father, by being holy as he is holy with their new nature (or, new life).
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List One – IDOLATRY – sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed

List Two – SINS OF THE MOUTH – anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk

Ephesians 4:17-19 - Reversionsim

The Eight Stages of Reversionism (or, backsliding)

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer **(1)**live as the Gentiles do, **(2)**in the futility of their thinking. They are **(3)**darkened in their understanding and **(6)**separated from the life of God <because of **(5)**the ignorance that is in them <due to **(4)**the hardening of their hearts. **(7)**Having lost all sensitivity, **(8)**they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”

(1) Reaction/Distracted Stage (“*...live as the Gentiles do...*”)

Gentiles unbelievers cannot focus on God during good or bad times.

The carnal believer faces impact in their life from circumstances that surface as a distraction (good or bad).

Impact- When something happens in life that causes you to spiritually flinch or look away from God. Like a bird hitting the windshield of a car, circumstances hit your view of God

Reaction- When you respond like a Gentile during circumstances and look away from the windshield.

Distracted- While you look away your focus is placed on something else. At this point you continue because you are either ignorant of doctrine or arrogant towards doctrine.

(2) Frantic Search for Happiness (“*...in the futility of their thinking...*”)

“Futility” is the Greek word ματαιοτητι or “mataiotati” is the word for emptiness, futility, worthlessness.

New Testament uses it to refer to:

- Presumption of human thought
- Pagan Idolatry
- A deceitful way of life

The idea of emptiness in their thinking gives the impression of a vacuum in their soul that will implode and suck in the first thing they see after the impact of life in stage one.

This stage is very deceitful because everything seems peaceful and happy. All ideas and actions are quickly justified and engaged in.

It is a period of great freedom and unhindered burdens, similar to the experience of a person falling through the air after leaving the top of a ten story building. At least, a great sense of freedom and control for the first nine floors down. Hitting the ground is the beginning of stage three

(3) Boomerang Stage (“*...darkened in their understanding...*”)

Frustration results from decisions made during stage two.

Adversity will increase forcing you to make a decision to return or continue into stage four.

This is the most common place for a believer to try to recover. But, they must have been taught how to recover and how to maintain or else they will never return to God’s perfect plan.

Attitudes of people in Boomerang Stage:

1. They want to try one more attempt at happiness without returning to God
2. They want to solve the problem without God due to their guilt.
3. They become angry at God and enter a more conscious rebellion.

(Stages 4, 5, 6 overlap but connect like a chain.)

(4) Black Out of the Heart (“*...the hardening of their hearts...*”)

The heart, or soul, is distorted, disengaged, or blacked out by the old sin nature.

When the heart is dysfunctional the emotions are left unrestrained and in control.

This leads quickly into stage five, Emotional Revolt

(5) Emotional Revolt of the Soul (“*...the ignorance that is in them...*”)

Emotional revolt creates psychotic behavior

Emotions swing believer back and forth

Personality is fractured and the believer swings through a wide range of personalities during a daily routine: happy, cheerful, apathy, self pity, crabby, miserable. Romans 7:24, “wretched man” is a psychological term

(6) Divine Detachment (“...separated from the life of God...”)

Failure to recover during stage five causes God to hand them over to themselves, their old sin nature.

Review:

- Believer in Fellowship. Controlled by Holy Spirit
- Believer in Stages 1 & 2. Controlled by Self
- Believer in Stages 3-5. Out of Control
- Believer in Stages 6-8. Controlled by a very distorted self

Example of Divine Detachment is Romans 1:24

Confession becomes a thing of the past

Life here is lived in Satan’s Domain

False doctrine replaces truth

Norms and standards fall

Light in soul becomes darkness; answers can not be seen

Result is scar tissue on the soul or a callused conscience.

(7) Scar Tissue on the Soul (“...Having lost all sensitivity...”)

Just like scar tissue builds up on wounds and makes the skin ugly to the sight & insensitive to the touch, so the soul becomes ugly during human fellowship and insensitive to the Holy Spirit

The believer begins to hurt those around them and cannot fulfill Eph. 4:32, “Be kind & compassionate one to another.”

With no sensitivity for right and wrong a whole new world opens up to them. They can allow themselves to do things they could not do before.

(8) Self Detachment (“...they have given themselves over to sensuality...”)

God detaches them at stage six. Here they detach themselves to their old sin nature

They live in greediness with no satisfaction

They become out cast

They rebel against everything listed below:

- Mankind-they use people
- Natural order
- Privacy
- Property
- Sexual boundaries
- Norms and standards
- The Lord Jesus Christ

This is the end of the line for them,

“They are brute beast, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught (put on exhibit as a source of testing to believers) and destroyed (die the sin unto death).” 2 Peter 2:12

One of two things happens with them:

1. They die the sin unto death (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 John 5:16)
2. Live on earth as a source of testing for other believers, very similar to Satan’s purpose

IMPORTANT NOTE: *If a person still has a desire to return to God they have not reached stage eight. They are at an earlier stage that does have a way out. Please see “Spiritual Recovery” from James 4:6-10.*

