

# AM Colossians 3:5-14 Away with the old and in with the new

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[ 0 : 00 ] Continuing with our series in Colossians, we're going to look today at verses 5-14, but to set it a little in its context I'll read again from verse 1.

! So Colossians 3, verse 1, that is on page 1185 of the Pew Bibles.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

[ 1 : 30 ] On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

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

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

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

Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.

[ 2 : 46 ] And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Amen. Amen. Well, let me ask you to turn now to Colossians, chapter 3.

I'm going to look at verses 5 to 14, beginning with the words in verse 5, Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you.

The letters of Paul can usually be divided into two parts. The doctrinal part first, and then the practical part.

And Colossians is no exception. The practical part starts, really, I suppose, back in chapter 2 and verse 6, with the word, therefore.

[ 4 : 14 ] Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. And that word, therefore, appears again now.

Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you. The logic is obvious.

If Jesus is Lord, and if you are united with him in his death and resurrection, then live as those who have been raised to newness of life.

He's already urged us in verses 1 to 4 to be heavenly minded.

Now he urges us in verses 5 to 14 to live holy lives. We can divide it into two parts.

[ 5 : 21 ] The negative part, in verses 5 to 9, putting our old life behind us. And the positive part, in verses 10 to 14, living the new life.

It's away with the old, and in with the new. Now let me emphasize right at the outset that Paul is writing here to Christians.

He is not telling non-Christians how to be saved. Some people imagine that if only they could stop sinning and start living a better life, that that would somehow make them Christians and gain them entry to heaven.

That is not the teaching of the Bible. We cannot lift ourselves up, as it were, by our own bootstraps.

No, the Bible teaches us that we first need to be saved. And then we can start thinking about living a holy life.

[ 6 : 41 ] Or to put it in theological terms, first we need to be justified, and then we can be sanctified.

Justification is being made right in the sight of God. Having our sins forgiven, and being clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

And that happens the moment we believe. Sanctification is the process of being made righteous in practice.

And that is the work of a lifetime. It's still a work of grace. We can't do it by ourselves. It's a work of the Spirit working within us.

But it does require cooperation on our part. If you're not yet a Christian, then there is a door that you must go through first.

[ 7 : 49 ] Before you can become holy. And that door is faith in Christ. But assuming you have gone through that door, let's look now at this highway of holiness, which you must follow.

And first the negative side. Putting our old life behind us. Paul begins with this very violent image.

Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you. He's already said back in verse 2, that we are to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Now he's going a stage further. Put to death those earthly things that are within you. The authorised version translates it, mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth.

And we call it, therefore, the mortification of sin. The Greek word is nekrosate, from nekros, meaning a dead body.

[ 9 : 16 ] In Glasgow, there is a hillside, covered with graves. It's called the necropolis. The city of the dead.

It's well worth seeing, by the way. A lot of famous people are buried there. Well, sin should be consigned to the necropolis. Kill it, and bury it.

He gives a list of some of the sins which have to go.

Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Now, this is obviously not a complete list of all sins. He's going to mention others himself later. But here he begins with the seventh and the tenth commandments, which he links with the second commandment.

[ 10 : 26 ] All sin is a breaking of the commandments. The seventh commandment says, as you will well know, you shall not commit adultery.

But Jesus extends it beyond that. He says that even if you look at a woman to lust after her, you've already committed adultery in your heart.

And thus, all unlawful sexual desires are included in that commandment. covetousness. And they're spelled out here.

The tenth commandment, meanwhile, says, you shall not covet. Covetousness is the desire to have something that is not rightfully yours.

It says in Exodus 20, you shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

[ 11 : 34 ] Sometimes causes amusement amongst non-Christians, coveting our neighbor's ox. But obviously, we must apply that to the present day.

Coveting your neighbor's car. Coveting your neighbor's job. Coveting your neighbor's bank balance. Desiring anything that is not rightfully yours.

And this, Paul says, is idolatry. It's a breach of the second commandment as well. Because it's putting other things in the place of God. Our only great desire should be for Christ.

If our desire is for our neighbor's house, or whatever, well, we've diverted our heart away from God. That is idolatry.

This is the way of the world. On account of such things, Paul says, the wrath of God is coming on the world. You have been called out of the world.

[ 12 : 44 ] Don't go back to it. You've been delivered from judgment. Don't go back to the sins that bring judgment.

This is the way you used to live, he says in verse 7. In these, you too, once walked when you were living in them. Put that past behind you.

Now the image is, as I've said, a violent one. Sin is seen here as the enemy to be destroyed.

In the Old Testament, when the Israelites came into the promised land, God commanded them to kill the Canaanites who were in the land.

Now that may shock us today, but God's judgment was on the Canaanites and they had to go. In fact, Israel got into deep trouble when they failed to destroy the Canaanites.

[ 13 : 49 ] They were corrupted by them. Likewise here, God's judgment is upon these sins. They have to go. And if we fail to kill them, we will be corrupted by them.

As Matthew Henry says in his usual vivid way, we must kill sin or sin will kill us. To use a different illustration, the illustration I used with the children, think about those sins as weeds.

gardeners will know that weeding is a long and tedious task, but it has to be done. Otherwise, your garden will soon be overgrown.

And those weeds have to be killed. It's no use taking half measures. It's no use cutting the tops off them.

They'll just grow back again. It's no use hiding them by covering them over with a layer of soil. They'll just grow through. It's no use saying, well, there's only a few of them.

[ 15 : 03 ] They'll spread. It's no use sparing them because maybe we see like that weed there, it's got a nice little yellow flower.

Who knows? Perhaps it'll be quite pretty. It won't. It will take over and the real flowers will be choked.

Likewise with sin. It's no use taking half measures with it. It's no use sparing sin because of the passing pleasures of sin, the little flowers that there might be on it.

It's no use trying to cover them over and hide them and not think about them. It's no use saying, well, there's only a few of them. We won't bother. Every sin is dangerous, however small.

They simply have to go. Now, it may be at this point that a question occurs to you. Hasn't Paul just said in verse 3 that we have already died with Christ?

[ 16 : 21 ] How come then that there's anything left to be killed? Hasn't sin been dealt with already? Well, yes, in principle it has.

the power of sin has been broken. But the presence of sin in our lives remains and it has to be dealt with.

Not until heaven will the root of sin be finally removed. Until then, there's a war to be fought. There are weeds to be dug up.

And they will keep coming through. It's a lifetime's work. And it's an important work. I read the other day a sermon by Samuel Rutherford, one of the greatest of the 17th century covenanters.

It was a communion sermon actually on the Song of Solomon, the very book that we're going to be looking at tonight. He says, should the redeemed of the Lord love their lusts that pursued Christ to his death and nailed him to the cross, then beware by going on in sin of saying amen to the shedding of Christ's blood.

[ 17 : 50 ] That's a serious thought to ponder, isn't it? Sin is the enemy within. It's an offence to Christ and it is seeking to destroy us.

Therefore, whenever you see sin in your heart, kill it. Paul now moves on to another set of sins using a slightly different image in verse 8.

But now you must put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.

This group of sins includes the sixth and the ninth and the third commandments. sixth commandment says you shall not murder. Jesus says that even anger will bring judgment upon you.

Anger is the first step towards murder. The ninth commandment says you shall not lie. The third commandment against blasphemy that includes obscene talk.

[ 19 : 03 ] Again, these are all common sins in the world and we may well find when we look at ourselves closely that we're guilty of them too. Think for example about road rage.

How many Christians let that one slip through the net? Fuming against that slow driver in front of you or that fast driver behind you.

Isn't that anger? isn't that one of the very sins for which Christ died? Or swearing?

I hope none of you swear yourselves, but do you tolerate it when it comes up on television? Paul's remedy is to put these sins away from us.

And the Greek word here is *apothesthe*, meaning cast them aside, throw them away, push them away from yourself.

[ 20 : 11 ] He uses the same word in Romans 13, the night is far gone, the day is at hand, so then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

and again in Ephesians 4, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour.

In Hebrews 12, you have the same word, let us lay aside every weight of sin which clings to us. Throw it away, push it away from yourself.

James says the same, put away all filthiness. In 1 Peter 2, verse 1, it says, put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Do you see how all the apostles here are speaking with one voice? We are to cast these things aside as something disgusting that we don't want to have anything to do with.

[ 21 : 20 ] Paul, there is the image again slightly in verse 9, seeing you have put off the old self. So in five verses we have put to death, put away and put off.

This last phrase, putting off the old self, is contrasted with putting on the new self in verse 10. And it suggests a change of clothing.

thing. Imagine you have come in from a muddy walk in the fields, you farmers, you do that pretty much every day. The first thing you do is take off those dirty clothes and put on nice clean clothes.

That's the thought here. Again, let me emphasize we're talking here about sanctification. A similar image is actually used of justification.

In Zechariah 3, God says of Joshua the high priest, when Satan accuses him, remove the filthy garments from him. He then says to Joshua, behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.

[ 22 : 39 ] Joshua did nothing. God put that clothing on him. That is what happens in justification. Christ takes away the filthy garment of sin and clothes us with the white robe of his righteousness.

But here we're dealing with sanctification. And here we are required to do something. Paul says you have put off your old self.

old man. You have put off the old self. symbolically in your baptism. Now you must clothe yourself with the new self, the new man.

You have received a new nature. You must now turn that new nature into reality. The old life is dead. Don't go back to it.

You have a new life. Live it. life. It is living the new life in verses 10 to 14.

[ 23 : 50 ] Again, this is based on what has happened already. You have put on the new self, Paul says. You've started a new life, symbolically, in baptism.

You have a new heart. You have a new spirit. You have the life of Christ dwelling in you. And that new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

In other words, we are being transformed into the image of Christ. God is at work in you. What he describes here is the reversal of the fall.

God created Adam in his own image, but that image was defaced by the fall. Not altogether destroyed, but defaced. But now we're being renewed in the image of Christ who is the image of God.

God is true. Paul adds, whoever you are, whatever your background. Verse 11 here, there is not Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in you all.

[ 25 : 15 ] There should be no racial or social divisions among Christians, because all of us are saved by the same blood of Christ. All of us are indwelt by the same spirit of Christ.

All of us are being transformed into the same image of Christ. In the ancient world, Jews and Greeks looked upon each other with suspicion and contempt.

Barbarians were regarded with fear and hatred. Scythians even more so. Scythians were originally nomadic horsemen from Persia and they were regarded as especially savage.

Freeman looked down on slaves. We can be sure that there were plenty of slaves in Colossae. But it doesn't matter. God shows no partiality.

In heaven there will be a great multitude that no one can number of every nation, tribe, and tongue. They'll all be there, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, the barbarian and the Scythian, the slave and the free.

[ 26 : 30 ] All gathered together worshipping Christ. Therefore, Paul says, whoever you are, whatever your background is, whatever your culture is, your aim is to be like Christ.

Christ was sinless. You won't attain that in this life. But you must make every effort to put away sin in imitation of Christ.

But also Christ is righteous. You will never attain to the perfection of Christ in this world. But that is where your aim must be, seeking to be like him.

He uses again the image of clothing in verse 12. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

You are God's elect. You are God's chosen ones. You are holy and beloved. Behave like it. Sometimes expressed in this way, be what you are.

[ 27 : 44 ] we could say that he is urging us here to be properly dressed. Nothing to do with suits or dresses, but rather the beautiful adornment of the Christian character.

Remember what Peter says about the women in 1 Peter 3, do not let your adorning be external, the braiding of hair, the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear, but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

Nothing wrong with a nice hairdo or jewellery, providing you're not flaunting your wealth or your beauty, but character matters more.

Something similar could be said to the men. Never mind the Armani suit or the designer t-shirt. Clothe yourself with Christian virtues.

That is what matters in the sight of God. Paul gives special prominence to forgiveness. Verse 13, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

[ 29 : 15 ] Jesus told a parable to the same effect in Matthew 18 about a servant who owed his master 10,000 talents, and his master forgave him.

So what did he do? He went out and found someone who owed him 1,000 talents, and he had him thrown into prison. A hundred talents, rather. Even less.

That's what we're like, isn't it? We've been forgiven such terrible sins, and yet we find fault with others for the tiniest sin. The Lord freely forgave you all your sins.

You owed him a debt you couldn't pay, and he paid it for you. So likewise, we must freely and graciously forgive others.

What it comes down to is that we must imitate Christ. Throughout this passage, that is the principle. Imitate Christ.

[ 30 : 24 ] As Christ is holy, you must be holy too. If you want to know what is required of you, simply look at Jesus, and imitate him.

The climax of this little section is in verse 14. Above all these things put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Our Lord Jesus Christ said that all the Ten Commandments are summed up in those two great principles.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Paul says in Romans 13, love is the fulfilling of the law.

And the supreme test of Christianity is that new commandment in John 13, that you love one another. Beautiful as all the other garments are, compassion, kindness, and so on, this is the most beautiful of all, love.

God is love. And if we have love, then we are truly like God. And love binds everything together.

[ 31 : 49 ] Every other grace is simply an expression of love. So let me ask you then, as we draw to a close, how is it with you?

Are you properly dressed? Let me say once again to anyone who is not yet a Christian, your first need is to trust in Christ.

Don't jump ahead of yourself trying to be holy if you're not yet saved. Don't try putting on the outward garments of holiness if the inward rottenness of sin hasn't been dealt with by Christ.

You need to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ first before you can put on those outer garments of holiness. You need to be saved and it's an urgent need.

Paul says here, the wrath of God is coming upon the world and it's coming upon you unless you are saved. That is your first need.

[ 33 : 12 ] And I say that to all, to young and old. You may have been brought up as a Christian, you may come regularly to church and that is good, but you personally must believe in Christ.

But to all of you who are Christians, I say simply this, live as Christians. What a terrible indictment it is of us when someone says, oh I never knew they were a Christian.

It should have been obvious, shouldn't it? Both the negative and the positive parts of this passage are important.

One without the other is not enough. There are Christians who take great care over the negative part and they studiously avoid sin.

But they never cultivate the fruits of righteousness. that was the era of the Pharisees. Holy but heartless.

[ 34 : 23 ] They're like the man in the parable who has one demon cast out of him and seven demons, even worse, come and dwell inside him. There are others who are full of love and compassion and forgiveness.

And that's beautiful. But they are careless about various besetting sins which apparently they don't consider to be important.

Those sins may be small but they are the proverbial fly in the ointment that makes it stink. We need both.

Purity and love. And only through Christ is it possible to have both. Let me close by reminding you it is all of grace.

Of yourself you can do nothing. Abide in the vine. Let Christ's love flow through you and you will become what he wants you to be.

[ 35 : 33 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.