

“Out With the Old” Colossians 3 Steve Harden 12/27/20

You can be turning in your Bibles to Colossians 3. If you remember, or if you’ve been around for a while, we had been working our way through Colossians and took a break back in November for the holidays. But for the next couple of weeks we’ll be returning here to Colossians 3, and then as Mike told you, on January 10 we will be installing Pastor Shane as our new pastor and so, I know you are excited about that. It’s going to be a great day. We’ve got several people coming in from other churches in the area and it’s just going to be a great time and so I know you’ll want to support him and his family in this new season, this new chapter, as we’ve been calling it. But in the next couple of weeks, we’re going to be looking at Colossians 3.

These verses seem to be appropriate for the time of year. You know, here at the end of the year between Christmas and New Year’s, a lot of us get reflective about what has happened in the past year and many of us look back and say, ‘You know, there are some habits there that I want to change,’ or ‘I want to kind of re-do that one and not do this.’ And then we look forward to the next year, and we look at things we want to do, and we want to press forward and to step into the New Year, maybe this year more than others, I don’t know. But we’re reflective and then we’re looking forward and that’s what seems to be happening here in Colossians 3. The message of this text in verses 5-11, and these are the verses that we’ll deal with today, speak about “out with the old,” getting rid of the past and then verses 12-15 talk about “in with the new.” It’s really one message over two weeks, okay? So, you’re only going to get half of it today and really, it’s kind of the rougher half, the second half is even much more exciting.

But tonight, we’re looking at “out with the old.” The old things that Paul is addressing here in Colossians 3 are those things that characterized our lives before we came to the knowledge and faith of Jesus Christ. Those things that characterized our lives, sinful behaviors that really have no place in the life of a follower of Christ. Sinful behaviors, sinful words, sinful attitudes, he covers them all. So, let’s get started here in verse 5. Paul writes: “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.” So Paul tells the Colossian church here to put these things to death! Destroy them.

It’s interesting to me how things kind of happen in seasons of history. Often, people get really nervous when the preacher starts talking about sin and the Christian. Many are ready to raise the flag on: ‘Are you being legalistic now preacher? Is this legalism?’ The antennae are out when we’re talking about sin and the Christian, and that’s okay! Sometimes thinking goes something like, ‘Doesn’t he know that all of our sin was forgiven and paid for on the cross? That every sin that we ever committed or are committing or will ever commit has been paid for on Calvary’s cross 2,000 years ago?’ Yes. That is true and yes, it is the hallmark of our faith, obviously. We need to be very careful, and rightly divide the word of God when we talk about the Christian and sin. But it is true that as blood-bought followers of Jesus, our sins will never be held against us, and it’s also true that any time we try to make good works or our own efforts at refraining from evil somehow bargaining power or chips with God in order to get what we want, that’s legalism and it’s to be despised.

However, the New Testament is full of admonitions to Christians to walk in a manner worthy of His name. To lay aside the sin that we all acknowledge clings to us, from our former self. The New Testament writers are not embarrassed to warn us of the devastating consequences of sin in a believer’s life. No, you do not lose your salvation when you sin, that’s not what we’re

talking about at all. No, you will never receive judgement or the wrath of God on judgement day, but you will bring great harm to the reputation of Christ and great harm to yourself and those who love you and that you love. John Owen, the great 17th century Puritan preacher said it this way in a book that he wrote about this, he said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” And I don’t think I can say it better than that. “Be killing sin or it *will* be killing you.” We cannot afford, as followers of Christ, to be careless or indifferent or blind to sin’s influence and its devastating effects upon ourselves and others. Paul felt so strongly in our text that he said, kill it! Execute it! Put it to death! He could not come up with stronger language to communicate the importance of getting rid of it. He says, take whatever steps necessary to eradicate it out of your life! Tolerate no compromise! Deal with it ruthlessly and radically! I’m reminded of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5. Do you remember what He said? “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out! If your right hand, causes you to sin, cut it off!” Now obviously, He’s not talking about mutilation, He’s saying, ‘Deal radically! Do what you need to do!’ Because sin destroys. Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.

Now, let’s get to the text. There are two things I want to share with you today. One is What sins should I put to death, and then secondly, How should I put them to death, okay? So, as we walk through this passage in Colossians 3, we find quite a list. Paul is merciless when he starts talking about sin. In verse 5, he lists two categories of sins, perhaps the two most dominant sins in our society today: sexual immorality and greed. First of all, sexual immorality. Let me give you two observations before we get into this. First, what Paul is advocating for in terms of sexual purity was in very sharp contrast to anything that existed in the ancient world. This was not heard of back then. The ancient world encouraged sexual indulgence of every sort. He was proposing a completely new virtue, a radical call to the pagan culture of his day! Most people in our culture would probably see it as pretty radical. But the second observation I see, before we get into it, is that as a believer, as a follower of Christ, a Holy Spirit indwelt follower of Jesus Christ, you have control over what you do sexually. There are those who would try to tell you, in our society and media today, that you really don’t have a whole lot of control over yourself, that you’re just going to do what you’re going to do and that you can’t help it. They make us out to be no more than animals with desires that we can’t control. That’s just not true. Nothing could be further from the truth. For a Christian, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, no desire, no passion is so entrenched that the Holy Spirit can’t conquer it. Now I’m not saying it’s easy, I’m not saying that it’s a walk in the park, but I’m saying, it’s possible, okay? Those are two general observations, but let’s walk through this list.

He says, “put to death sexual immorality,” very plainly. Any sexual act outside the marriage relationship of one man and one woman is sexual immorality, it’s just it. Anything outside of that is immorality. He says, “put to death impurity.” Impurity is a wider and more subtle term. It embraces not only sexual relations but every imagination of the heart or mind that is outside of one man and one woman in a marriage relationship. Okay, so it’s not only actions but it’s imaginations and the mind. And then he says, “put to death passion and evil desire,” these are very closely related terms, it’s hard to draw a hard and fast line but it’s those sexual longings or evil desires that long for what is forbidden. What is forbidden? It is that which is outside the marriage relationship of one man and one woman. It’s almost like Paul is saying with these three different categories, he’s saying, ‘Look men, I’m answering your questions,’ because it’s like we say, ‘Well, what about this?’ or ‘What about that?’ ‘Maybe, is this okay?’ He says, ‘No!’ In so many different ways, he says no. Anything outside of this in regard to sexual purity is

wrong. Put to death, he says, any action, desire, or thought regarding sexual relations with anyone but your spouse.

But it's interesting, he then goes on to say, "Put to death covetousness." Covetousness is just a desire to have more, and he's talking about greed here, an incessant desire to have more and never being satisfied or desiring what belongs to someone else. He's talking about material goods, or money, right? I've found it interesting that the Apostle Paul puts sexual immorality and covetousness in the same sentence, the same verse. Well, what do they have in common? I would say, everything. It's the same root problem. The link between the two is that someone who practices either one is seeking happiness, fulfillment or contentment from something other than God, Himself. Whether it's sexual immorality or money and possessions, they are poor substitutes for the most high God. That is the definition, as well, of idolatry. Idolatry is seeking our pleasure, our happiness, our contentment, in anything other than God, Himself. It matters little if our alternate god is sex or if our alternate god is wealth. It's still idolatry. You see, discontentment for the believer is charging God with a dereliction of duty. It's saying, 'God, you haven't done what I want you to do because you have not provided for me what I think I need to be whole, or happy, so I'm going to look for it elsewhere.' "Put to death sexual immorality and covetousness."

Then he goes on, 'put to death attitudes,' sinful attitudes and sinful words in verses 8-9. Follow along with me. "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." He just keeps hammering on! Three bad attitudes. He talks about anger, this word in the original language, my definition says, 'under the surface anger.' It speaks of anger that is a state of mind that lies just below the surface. The word is used for the ripening of fruit. You know, when fruit starts to ripen, and the juice is produced, and it swells, and it swells until you are sure that the skin is going to bust. It's that swelling of that ripening fruit. Or if you will, like a volcano that is rumbling that hasn't blown yet, it's that pressure that is occurring. Now, what are the indications that I might have this type of anger? Well, do you withdraw emotionally from people or situations? Do you tend to cry or pout or sulk? You may have a habit of giving people the cold shoulder or refusing to talk out a difficult conflict. This under the surface anger boils; it would rather run from a relationship than actually get in and solve the problem. It is always being on edge. Have you ever heard someone say, 'Man, around you it's like walking on eggshells'? If that's true, then it may be this under the surface anger. It's carrying around bitterness and resentment not befitting a child of God.

Wrath. Wrath is when that skin busts. Wrath is when the volcano erupts, right? That's the outpouring, the passionate, spontaneous outburst, spewing venom over other people. Some of the characteristics of a wrathful person is having a quick temper, or being quick to attack another person, given to yelling or using biting sarcasm or harsh words. Anger and wrath are often found together. We get creative about our sins, you know, sometimes people clam up until they blow up, or they blow up and then clam up, right? So, we recognize these things. The last one is malice. Malice is wanting to hurt somebody, badly. It's wanting to injure them or bring them pain. It's the attitude which plans evil and then rejoices in the misery of one who it chooses to hate. The example that comes to mind with malice is, do you remember in the book of Esther, Haman? How he was rejoicing about the building of the gallows for Mordecai? That is that malice, that planning of evil, that conscious desire to harm another. Three attitudes. Anger, wrath and malice.

Then he starts talking about harmful words. He says “slander,” speaking negatively about another person, or making accusations in order to hurt the reputation of another, defamation of another person’s character, painting somebody else in a bad light. “Obscene talk,” it’s obvious to us, obvious or obscene abusive speech. And then he goes on to lying to one another, just not speaking the truth. My friend, lying is not a little sin. When you lie, something sacred has been shattered. Trust and confidence are gone when you’re not truthful. It’s really sad. There are people who I’ve met through my life that I think if they told me it was raining outside, I’d have to go outside and check, because lying is a way of life with them. It’s serious. Remember, Ananias and Saphira? God takes lying seriously.

So, it’s quite a list, right? Most of us can see ourselves somewhere, and long to put those off or recognize the consequences of those, so how do we put these off? How does Paul say that we can rid ourselves of these? Now, we’ll deal more comprehensively with this next week, so hopefully you’ll come back, but I just want to start this part of the message by saying, in verse 5 there’s a little word that means everything. Paul says, “Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you.” And the old saying is still true, when you see a ‘therefore,’ you need to see what it’s there for, right?

No one denies, I know of no one that denies that Paul had a magnificent mind. He was brilliant and a genius, incredible. He could soar in flights of truth about God. He could state eternal truths in a few words. He could scale the heights of human understanding so high that scholars can give their lives to try to understand what he means in just one of the letters that he wrote. Yet, we always find from the apostle Paul that no matter how high he has soared with the eagles, that he always follows up with crystal clear, practical, ethical commands. He always does. He speaks what is true about God and then he tells us how to respond to that truth. It’s really a beautiful thing. As I’ve said to you often, from this very pulpit, perhaps the most important question that you can ask yourself in any situation is, what is true? After answering what is true, then you are ready to respond accordingly. This is what Paul does. He always gives doctrine first, what is true? And then he tells us how to respond.

In the book of Romans, in the first eleven chapters, he soars with the eagles and he tells us what is true, and then in Romans 12 he says, “I appeal to you, therefore” and then he lays out how we are to respond to this glorious truth about God. In the book of Ephesians, the first three chapters deal with doctrine and he soars with the eagles, and then beginning in chapter 4 he says, “I therefore urge you to walk my brothers,” right? In response to the truth, this is how you live. Paul does the very same thing here in Colossians 3.

Now, I know it’s been awhile since we looked at the first four verses but let me remind you a little bit. He links these glorious truths regarding our identity in Christ in verses 1-4 to the ethical commands in verses 5 and following. So, what does he say is true about believers in the first four verses? Well he says in verse 1 that we have been raised with Christ. We will experience resurrection with him! In verse 3, we have died to the old way of life, the old sinful man, and our lives now are hidden in Christ. We are so united with Christ that what is true in Him and of Him is now true in us. We are unified with Him. In verse 4, we see Christ, when He appears at His second coming, all of us who have died in Christ will come back with Him. And we will return with Him and be with Him, and then he sums it all up by saying, “Christ, who is your life.” He is everything for us!

So, in light of those glorious truths, he then says, ‘Be who you are! You are a child of God. You are a child of the King! Be who you are. Act like a child of the King.’ Verse 7 says, ‘I used to walk in a certain way, but no more! I don’t do the things I used to do, why? Because I’m

a child of the King!' In verse 9 he says, "do not lie to one another," we talked about that, "seeing that you have put off the old self with his practices, and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator." Let that resonate with you. Put on the new! Which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. The heart of sanctification, the heart of change, for the believer, is putting off the old man and putting on the new man by looking at the glory of God. It's seeing, what is true about God? And the more our focus goes to Him, things just start to fall away.

Listen to Tozer, A.W. Tozer, he was writing about worship but it's also true about our Christian living. He says, "The most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God. A right conception of God is basic, not only to systematic theology but," listen, "But to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple, where it is inadequate or out of plumb, the whole structure must sooner or later collapse." My friend, that is true about your life! Where your idea about God is skewed, you're off your foundation and you're out of plumb and the whole structure will sooner or later collapse! He goes on, he says, "The gravest question before the church," and I may add, for you, "the most grave question before the church is always God, Himself, and the most pretentious," or important, "Fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like." Now listen really close. He says, "We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God." That, my friend, is a principle. We tend to move toward our image of God.

So, I ask you, again, what is true? You must know what is true. What is true about you, Christian, today? You are a child of the King. You are not who you were before. You're a child of the King and I promise you there is nothing like recognizing that you are a child of the King for those old things to start falling away. Your King is beautiful! And wise! And powerful! And gracious and merciful! And He is righteous and good! The more you know about your King, the more you'll long to be like Him, because you will move toward your mental image of Him. You see, it is so terribly inconsistent for me to act like what I'm not. I'm not an unbeliever. I'm a follower of Jesus, so it is not consistent at all to act like I am not. Paul writes, there were things that once characterized your life. It may have been sexual immorality, it may have been covetousness, it may have been attitudes like anger and wrath and malice, it may have been words of slander and obscenity. All these things may have been characterized in you; they are who you were, but you're not that person anymore. You're not him. You're different now, and it's not like you're never going to sin, I'm not talking about perfection here, I'm saying, that a man of God does not remain as he is. He is ever growing in likeness to Christ. You are different now. You are redeemed and you are forgiven. You have a King for a Father. Nothing will change your life like knowing and understanding you are a child of the King.

My friends, let me get really personal here. I plead with you, be putting to death the sin that so easily entangles you! We all tend to deal with sins that are particular to us, they are not new to mankind but, you know what I'm talking about. There are those that are harder for us. May I encourage you to deal with it radically? To put it away and out of your life? Because it's not who you are! You are a child of the King. There are terrible consequences for believers who refuse to deal with their sin. I'm not talking about ultimate judgement. I'm not talking about the wrath of God or saying that God is going to punish you for your sin. I'm not talking about those things, but over and over and over again through my life, I have seen and walked with individuals, oftentimes professing believers whose lives are train wrecks because of sin, because they refuse to put it to death and then they reap the consequences. There are consequences.

I'm not saying it's easy, I'm not saying it won't take a lifetime, but I'm saying you need to treat it seriously. May I call upon you to turn from your sin, to confess it before God and repent. He is faithful. He will forgive you! He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness! He will purify you. If you're here this evening and not a follower of Jesus, confess and repent of your sins, you will not experience the wrath of God in that day. If you are a follower of Christ tonight, I can guarantee, you will not experience the wrath of God in that day. You are not going to be punished. He is a loving Father. Confess your sin as clearly as you know how and repent. Ask Him on the basis of Jesus' death on the cross to cleanse you and forgive you of your sin, and He will. But I would be remiss in my role as shepherd to not tell you that sin has consequences. Even if you are totally forgiven, there is freedom there! But some things you can't undo, and there are consequences. Kill it! Destroy it! Deal with it. If you need help, talk to me, talk to Shane, talk to one of your elders. We would love to help! But don't play with fire. Let's pray.