

Horsley Evangelical Church ([www.horsleyec.org.uk](http://www.horsleyec.org.uk))

Minister Rev Ken McIntosh 18th April 2021

## Colossians 3:5-11 The Drastic Side of Holiness

The title of today's sermon is taken from a chapter of a commentary on Paul's letter to the Colossians. Our verses today speak about *the drastic side of holiness*. That is to say, if you and I are ever to grow more like our Lord Jesus Christ in character, then it will require drastic and radical actions on our part.

There are two phrases where this drastic action against sin is mentioned. The first is in verse 5 where Paul writes – *put to death*. Put to death whatever belongs to the earthly nature (5). It's extreme and even violent language. Do not let any of the things that belong to your sinful nature live or breathe. Be ruthless with them. Slay them. Then the other drastic action required against sin is found in verse 8 where Paul writes – *rid yourselves* of all such things as these. Throw them out. They are uninvited and unwelcome guests. Take such things by the scruff of the neck and throw them out on the street.

You will remember that the Lord Jesus had a similar ruthless attitude towards sin. Perhaps it is the Lord Jesus that Paul is copying here. For when speaking about the sin of adultery Jesus said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go to hell." The drastic side of holiness.

For we must understand that to sin against God is a very serious thing. And to suffer the judgement of God against sin is the most frightening prospect. That is why we must take such radical steps against sin.

And we all need to hear this 'wakeup call' regularly, because we are all prone to go soft on sin. We settle down with it and live with behaviour that is dangerous and offensive to God. Our lives can quietly drift into sinful habits. Little by little we let sin come in, take root and grow so that in the end our lives are indistinguishable from the pagan world around us. But that is not how God demands his people should live. The root meaning of the word 'holy' is to be *separate*. The Christian must be separate and different from those living around us who do not know or love God. If we profess to belong to God and love him, this must be seen in our behaviour each day. We must live differently.

Now the passage next week is much more positive. Paul will remind the Colossians in verses 12-17 of behaviour we are to *adopt* as Christians. But the passage today is much more negative. There are things we must avoid. Things we must kill off and throw out by the scruff of the neck. No compromise.

So let's think first about **something to kill** in verses 5-7. [Read verses 5-7](#). What we are to kill then is everything that belongs to the earthly, sinful nature. And in particular, Paul homes in on sexual sins. Some say these sins are *hidden* sins whereas the sins in verse 8, 9 are *open* sins. Perhaps, yet every sin is open before God and destroys to the soul.

In verse 7 Paul mentions *the life the Colossians once lived*. [Read verse 7 again](#). It implies they have been given a *new life*. And the Christian has indeed been given a new life – which is in fellowship with Christ. We have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son whom God loves. We have died to the powers and behaviour of this world. We have been raised with Christ to a new life with new power and new hope. And this new life will be seen one day in all its glory

in heaven. Therefore, we must now put to death whatever belongs to the old life and what Paul calls here *the earthly nature*.

Perhaps that command might come as a surprise if you were reading this for the first time. You might assume that because God has given me a new life that my earthly nature has died. You might assume that the sinful nature in the Christian is no more. But alas, as this verse 5 implies, it is not dead. The sinful nature lies dormant even in the Christian's life. And given half a chance it will rise up and do terrible damage.

Remember the words of the Lord to Cain when Cain was angry with his brother Abel. "Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:7). The sinful, fallen nature is not dead in anyone. One day, praise God, it will be! But it's not dead at the moment. Hence the command here that every day we must put it to death. Slay it. Crucify it. Show it no mercy. For our life is now with Christ.

Until our Lord Jesus returns there is a war going on and we are all involved. It is a war we cannot see and don't really understand. It's a spiritual conflict where we are up against foes that are not flesh and blood. And in this battle there are many temptations and many struggles. But we are called to obey God and deny these temptations which come into our lives. We have to *prove* we belong to God. And we prove it by putting certain things to death.

The list here in verse 5 is all to do with sexual sins against God. These sins may be against other people. But they are always against God. Now let's be clear. Sexual intimacy is good and is a gift from God. It is designed and given to men and women by God. But his design is that this precious gift is to be enjoyed within the marriage of one man and one woman. Within such a relationship, which is itself a gift from God, he has given the gift of intimacy. But *sexual immorality* (5) is when such intimacy is practised outside of heterosexual marriage.

Therefore whenever the temptations come to engage in such *sexual immorality*, Paul says these thoughts and desires must be put to death. They must be given no 'air'. And when that is a struggle, God will help us. He is on our side. Then Paul talks about *impurity*. This refers to any behaviour in the same context of sexual intimacy which is *impure* in God's sight. It helps enormously to have a knowledge of God's word in the Bible, for there we discover what is pure and impure in his sight. But if we do not know the word of God, it is much easier to be deceived into thinking something is pure and good, when in fact it is abhorrent in God's sight. There are certain lifestyles in the context of sexual intimacy which society tells us we must accept and celebrate today – homosexual lifestyles. But we cannot celebrate them. For they are impure in God's sight.

*Lust* (5) is a sexual desire for someone who is not your husband or wife in a heterosexual relationship. *Evil desires* (5) are desires which are contrary to God's will and God's command. Again it is necessary for us to understand what God will is from Scripture so that we can recognise what such evil desires are. That's why Paul prays in 1:9,10. [Read 1:9,10](#). This is one reason why we need to know the Scriptures and read the Scriptures regularly - so that we understand and recognise things which God sees as 'evil'. It doesn't matter how the media 'sees' things. It's what God thinks of such things that is important.

Then the word *greed* (5) is probably to be understood here in terms of sexual pleasure. There is no self-control. The person acts as they please because they are greedy for sexual satisfaction. And then the word *idolatry* (5) refers to all these things mentioned in verse 5, not just 'greed'. All of these sins are a form of idolatry because they all seek to please self before pleasing God. They are worshipping others

things or other people before they worship God. The idolator sets their heart on such things before they set their heart on loving God.

But Paul is very clear here. He says all such sinful earthly desires are to be put to death. Do not let them live or grow up or even breath. For they will only lead you away from God and put you under his judgement.

See how he makes that very clear in verse 6. [Read verse 6](#). Paul says the same thing in a few of his letters. And it's something we need to be reminded of regularly because we forget the wrath of God. We forget it's coming. We forget that God is provoked to fierce anger because of sin. We don't think these things are serious. We are duped and blinded to the consequences of these things. But Paul says it is because of such things that the wrath of God is coming.

The wrath of God is already seen in the way the Lord gives people and societies over to sin, especially sexual sin. But Paul is referring here to the Day of God's wrath, the Day of his judgment, when God's patience with men will end and his wrath will be poured out. This is not the Day when men will have their knuckles wrapped or in effect, be put into prison for a few years before being welcomed into heaven. This is not the even Day when men will be annihilated and cease to exist, like the snuffing out of a candle. No, this is the Day when there will be a general resurrection from the dead. Everyone will be raised from the dead, not just the Christian. But all unbelievers will be raised to suffer the eternal punishment of God for their sins, the wrath of God in the eternal punishment of hell.

And since that Day is coming because of men's sins, then the Christian is to distance himself as far as he can from sin. The greatest thing for you to fear in life is the wrath of God. Look, whatever it takes, make sure you do not suffer his wrath, for it is eternal.

[Read verse 7](#). So the Colossians had not become Christians because they were 'good' people had they. They had lived sinful lives, just like the Corinthians and just like every other Christian – [read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#). The Colossians had not become Christians because they were 'good' people but because they had received the grace of God. They *used* to walk in these things. But now they had received a new life. Therefore, walk differently. In fact put these things that belong to the earthly nature to death.

**Something to kill.** But then in verses 8, 9, **Something to throw out.** And this time Paul's focus is on what we might call *sinful anger*. [Read verses 8-10a](#). You may remember in the story of Nehemiah what Nehemiah did when he learned that Tobiah, the enemy of the Jews, had put his things in a room within the temple courts. Nehemiah threw them out and then had the room purified. [Read Nehemiah 13:4-9](#). What a cheek Tobiah had storing his 'stuff' in a room within the temple complex of the Lord. Nehemiah threw them out – they had no business to be there.

Now it is this same drastic action that Paul is calling the Christians to do with the behaviour he now lists in verse 8. These things have no place in your life! Since your life is now a temple of the living God it must remain clean and pure. So what things must be thrown out? [Read verse 8, 9](#). Now the sad thing to realise is that the lists in verses 8 and 5 are not just random. No, these things are written after Paul had spoken to Epaphras – Epaphras who was one of the Colossians and who knew what was going on – and who was with Paul when Paul wrote this letter.

I think we all know what *anger* is (8). There is such a thing as righteous anger, but it's a thin line that can easily be crossed into sinful anger. *Rage* (8) is when sinful anger is given full vent and expression. *Malice* (8) is when evil is planned in the heart against another person. *Slander* (8) is when the malice and anger are expressed in words and these words are aimed at destroying a person's reputation and character. And we all know what *filthy language* is.

In my youth, a child was threatened with having their mouth washed out with soap if they used filthy words. For some language is foul, not only to the ears of people but especially in the ears of God. And especially when that filthy language is from a child of God. I think we all know what *lies* are (9). But how sad to read that the Colossians were lying to one another.

Such behaviour must be vigorously thrown out of your life. They are uninvited and unwelcome guests in your home. Whatever excuse you give will not do. 'My father used to have a quick temper'. Perhaps he did. But that's no excuse for you to rant and rave and use bad language. There's no excuse. In all matters of sin there must be zero tolerance.

But the reason Paul gives to avoid such behaviour this time is not the wrath of God, but something else. [Read verse 9, 10](#). The old self and the old life has been discarded like an old suit of clothes, for God has given you a new self. In other words, remember who you are. Remember to whom you belong. Remember the cost of your salvation. Remember where you are destined – even glory. These sins of anger, like the sins of sexual immorality have no place in your life. Do something about it. Every day, do something about it. The resolve to be holy must be renewed each day. You have spent enough time in the past doing such things. But no more. No more.

**Something to kill. Something to throw out. But then finally something to nurture (10,11).** What is the something which has to be nurtured and cherished? It is our new life in Christ. [Read verse 9-11](#). In verses 5-9 we have been reminded of the effort *we* have to make in our Christian lives. But now we have the balance, for now we are reminded of the 'effort' God makes in our lives.

He it is who has given us this new life in his Son. And what does Paul tell us about the new life here? He says it is being *renewed*. There is a work of renewal constantly going on in our lives. And this work of renewal is from God. We are being renewed in knowledge - the knowledge we have of our Saviour. And we are being renewed in the image of our creator.

Because of the fall, people have lost something of the image of their creator. His image has not been completely lost, but it has been marred. But the work of God now is to renew his image in us. In Christ are being made like our creator in nature and character. This 'creator' could refer to God our heavenly Father or equally it could refer to Christ our Saviour. But it is something very wonderful. The Christian is being changed and renewed back into the image of our creator. And that work is from God.

And the workshop is the church of the Lord Jesus. [Read verse 11](#). *Barbarians* were thought to be *uncivilised* because they could not speak Greek. *Scythians* were known for their brutality. *Greeks and Jews* could never be friends, and *slaves and free* did not mix together. But in the Lord Jesus Christ, our characters are being renewed and now there are no longer barriers between those who belong to the Lord Jesus. We are one in him. And we will all reflect something of the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the work of God in us. And this is what we have to nurture and cherish – the new life we have from God. Yes, we have a part to play in our sanctification. *We* must put to death the old nature. *We* are to throw out the old behaviour. It is no longer who we are. But we do so knowing that God has taken the initiative. He has chosen us. He has loved us dearly - as verse 12 will remind us. And ultimately he is the one who will carry on this great work to completion.