

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Becoming What You Already Are

Colossians 3:5–11

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to the book of Colossians. Our passage today is Colossians 3:5–11. And the first word in this passage I want to stick in your memory banks for the duration of this message. Here it is— νεκρώ (nekroō).

The English word “necrosis” means death of cells or death of tissue in the body. A “necromancer” is a sorcerer who communicates with the dead. Both of those English words are derived from this Greek word νεκρώ, which is a verb that means “kill” or “put to death.”

And in the course of today's message, I want to call you to become an assassin. I want to call you to become a hunter. I want to call you to become a butcher. I want to call you to become a killer. I want to call you today to become an executioner.

“What are we killing, Pastor Tony?” We are killing the deeds of the flesh. Paul says, “νεκρώ that which is earthly in you.” Paul says necrotize that which is earthly in you. Paul says essentially mortify your flesh. Paul is inviting you today, in Colossians 3, as a follower of Jesus Christ and one who has been redeemed by his blood, to put to death the deeds of your flesh.¹

Now the placement of this passage is extremely important in Paul's argument in Colossians. This is not chapter 1 of Colossians. Paul doesn't start this book of Holy Scripture saying, “Necrotize your flesh.” That is out of keeping with Paul's normal pattern and sequence.²

No, Paul spends two chapters in Colossians talking about who Jesus Christ is and who you are in Christ Jesus. Once you've got that down, then you can become an assassin.³

Let me say it another way—you don't put to death the deeds of your flesh in order to earn your place in Christ Jesus.⁴ You put to death the deeds of your flesh because you are already in Christ Jesus.⁵ Everyone with me? You are killing the thing that Jesus has already permanently killed.⁶

Let me say it another way—you are becoming what you already are.⁷ You are fighting a battle, he's already won. But that doesn't make this task easy. Please don't make that mistake. I've been battling

¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 136: “While we wait for ‘the redemption of [the] body’ (Rom. 8:23), the redeemed spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit, must kill the sin attacking the flesh.”

² Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 94–5: “For Paul, doctrine demands duty; creed determines conduct; facts demand acts.”

³ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 212: “Given the forcefulness of the repeated insistence that the Colossian believers had already ‘died’ with Christ (2:12, 20; 3:3), the first specific exhortation is something of a surprise: ‘therefore kill off your members which are on the earth.’

⁴ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 219: “‘Put to death’ (νεκρώσατε) is built on the previous assertion that ‘you have died’ (v. 3). The relationship between the previous indicative statement and the present aorist imperative must be noted... In this context, therefore, the call to ‘put to death’ the old practices is to be balanced by the recognition that Christ's death allows such an imperative to be a possibility. Moreover, this call is also based on the fact that believers were already ‘dead in [their] transgressions’ (2:13). This call to ‘put to death’ the old self is the living out of the victory that has already been won.”

⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 255: “Union with Christ, because it puts us in a new relationship to sin and brings us into the sphere of the Spirit's power, will impact the way we live. Ultimately, then, the imperative ‘put to death’ in this verse must be viewed as a call to respond to, and cooperate with, the transformative power that is already operative within us.”

⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 135: “At the moment of salvation, ‘our old self was crucified with [Christ], that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin’ (Rom. 6:6). That positional reality, however, must be worked out in the believer's practical living.”

⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 255: “Or, to use the language often applied to this general theological concept: ‘become what you are.’”

my flesh for forty years... Trust me, it's not easy. But we don't do it in order to be saved or to stay saved, we do it because we are saved.⁸ And that makes all the difference in the world.

Write this down, church. I'll give you three big statements today derived from the three imperatives that Paul gives in this passage in verse 5, verse 8, and verse 9.

Here's the first.

1) **Kill** the things that are **killing** you (3:5-6)

The Puritan Richard Baxter wrote, "Kill sin before it kills you." He said, "Spare it not, for it will not spare you. It is your murderer... so kill it before it kills you."⁹

Paul says similarly in verse 5.

⁵ Put to death¹⁰ therefore¹¹ what is earthly in you.¹²

If the backside of that statement sounds familiar, it's because Paul has already talked about that which is earthly. He said in the previous passage, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:2).¹³ Same phraseology. Same concept.

And just so we're clear, when Paul talks about things that are on the earth, he's not talking about food, family, and football. And he's not talking about birdwatching, baby-making, and basketball. Look at the list:

⁵ ... sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

This is what's referred to by scholars as a vice list.¹⁴ These are the "earthly" things in you. This is essentially equivalent to what John calls worldliness in 1 John—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. John said there, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Paul's words here are even stronger than John's. He's saying, "Don't just *don't love the things of the world*. But also, put them to death."¹⁵

This is worth belaboring just a bit. Stay with me here. God is not a cosmic killjoy. And Christians are not people who are going around making sure nobody is having any fun. When God tells us in the Bible to put to death the things of the earth, he's not talking about sex, money, or earthly possessions. Not directly anyway. Those "earthly pleasures" are not intrinsically evil.

⁸ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 135–6: "We have died to sin's penalty, but sin's power still can be strong and our flesh is weak... Sin is like a deposed monarch who no longer reigns, nor has the ability to condemn, but works hard to debilitate and devastate all his former subjects. Sin is still potent, and success against it demands the Spirit's power."

⁹ Quoted in MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 136. The full quote is as follows: "Use sin as it will use you; spare it not, for it will not spare you; it is your murderer, and the murderer of the world: use it, therefore, as a murderer should be used. Kill it before it kills you; and though it bring you to the grave, as it did your Head, it shall not be able to keep you there."

¹⁰ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 219: "To 'put to death' means to live with a recognition that one is already freed from the power of sin. This relationship between the imperative and the indicative is reflected in versions that translate the imperative as 'consider ... as dead' (NASB)."

¹¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 255: "The relationship between the first paragraph (vv. 1–4) and this one (vv. 5–11) is marked with the inferential conjunction *therefore*. In a general way, Paul is probably suggesting that, since we are to have a 'heavenly mind-set,' we should be eager to get rid of behavior that does not reflect that mind-set."

¹² MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 137: "When he speaks of killing bodily parts or members, Paul is actually referring to the sins associated with those members. It should be noted that this hits at the Colossian dualism regarding body and spirit. Paul is saying that the body should be holy, under the control of the redeemed spirit."

¹³ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 212: "to avoid 'setting one's mind on what is on the earth' (3:2) is not achieved by dreamy reflection (see on 3:2) but requires forceful self-discipline ('put to death')."

¹⁴ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 216: "Numerous other vice (e.g., 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) and virtue (e.g., 2 Cor 6:6–7; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 4:2–3; Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:2) lists can be found in NT letters."

¹⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 259: "The warnings of verses such as this are designed to encourage God's people to engage seriously and passionately in the process of divesting themselves of the attitudes and lifestyle characteristic of this world."

And we are not ascetics. We've dealt with that already. Asceticism and severity to the body and self-made religion are stupid. Paul openly mocked those things in **chapter 2**, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch."

We don't kill those pleasurable things that God has given us. We kill *instead* the sinful and dangerous expressions of those pleasures. Look again at the list.

sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God ¹⁶ is ¹⁷ coming. ¹⁸

God's wrath will one day be *devastatingly* poured out on this world and on sinners for their pervasive sinfulness. But we, as Christians, aren't children of wrath. We are the children of God. So why would we do the things that the children of wrath do? **Brothers and sisters in Christ, this should not be so!**¹⁹

Now let's take a closer look at this vice list. Notice if you will, that this list of five vices is frontloaded with terms that relate to sexual sin. I would suggest to you that this is not an accident. Men and women who are the children of God often—too often—fall into sexual sin just like the world.

The first word here is πορνεία (*porneia*) which the ESV translates "sexual immorality." This involves any and every expression of sexual activity outside of a monogamous, heterosexual, marital relationship. Let me state for the record that sex is not the enemy here. Sex is a wonderful and amazing gift from God. **But if you are having sex outside of a monogamous, heterosexual, marital relationship, you need to quit. You are guilty of πορνεία. Christians don't do that. That is what the children of wrath do, not the children of God. The children of God put that sin to death.**²⁰

The next two words "impurity"²¹ and "passion"²² also have sexual overtones. These involve lustful desires, lustful thoughts, pornography,²³ voyeurism, lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh kind of stuff. Let me just

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 141–2: "Because believers have been delivered 'from the wrath to come' (1 Thess. 1:10), and will experience no wrath (1 Thess. 5:9), Paul is not warning us that if we sin we will feel the furious wrath of God. Rather he is saying that those who are Christ's, who have been made one with Him, who love Him and serve His glory, would certainly not wish to participate in those kinds of behaviors and thoughts that are characteristic of those who will feel His eternal wrath. The children of God would certainly not want to act like the children of wrath."

¹⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 216: "The verb (ἐργεταί) could denote a wrath already in operation—that is, presumably, as in Rom. 1:18–32, in the consequences which follow from failure to acknowledge and worship God as God (Caird 205). In that case the wrath takes the form of God giving or allowing his human creatures what they want, leaving them to their own devices—the continuing avarice and abuse of sexual relations being its own reward. But the concept as taken over by the first Christians is more typically future oriented; so predominantly in Paul (Rom. 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; 1 Thes. 5:9)."

¹⁸ Ancient manuscripts and modern English versions are divided on whether to statement "on the sons of disobedience" is original. The ESV omits it. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 210n4: "This phrase is omitted by very important witnesses, particularly $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ and B. It could have been inserted in (unconscious) echo of Eph. 5:6. But the beginning of the next verse seems to presuppose an antecedent reference to people: 'among whom ['in which' would make the subsequent 'in them' tautologous] you also ...' (see Metzger 624–25). Translations are also divided: the phrase is omitted by RSV, NEB/REB, and NIV and included by GNB, NJB, and NRSV; almost all commentators favor omission."

¹⁹ Romans 2:7–8 makes clear that "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury."

²⁰ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 96–7: "I have known professing, Bible-carrying 'Christians' who talked sensitively about theology and serious issues, yet were adulterous and even incestuous. I have known Christian workers who were fundamentalists at work (mouthing all the shibboleths) and cable TV voyeurs at home. Even more tragic, the delusion is so deep that they see no inconsistency in their behavior."

²¹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 214: "Ἀκαθαρσία is almost exclusively Pauline in the New Testament (nine of the ten occurrences) and a natural associate with πορνεία in 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; and Eph. 5:3 (cf. Eph. 5:5 and Rev. 17:4)."

²² Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 220: "'Lust' (πάθος) literally reads 'passion' (ASV, NAB, NASB, NRSV, NKJV, ESV), but in this context it most likely refers to 'shameful passion' (NET) of a sexual nature. This is confirmed by its use elsewhere in Paul, especially when this is used to characterize 'the pagans, who do not know God' (1 Thess 4:5; cf. Rom 1:26)."

²³ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 232: "Beyond marital infidelity and other immoral acts, contemporary readers should also be reminded that pornography, which is so prevalent among Christians and even clergy, does not simply involve a 'two-dimensional artifact' but is itself 'a series of activities' that reduces the person (often a woman) to a subordinate tool devoid of the dignity as one created in the image of God."

say that our world is drowning in a sludge of sexual perversion, and it is manifested in broken families, unwanted pregnancies, illicit activities, STDs, and criminal behavior like sex-trafficking. Our broken world is increasingly broken by the sexual sins of God's *imago dei* creatures. **I remember my pastor decrying the state of our world thirty years ago and suggesting that it couldn't get much worse. And I'm here to tell you that in the thirty years since, it's gotten much worse.**

And here's the thing, Christians are called to be different. God expects us to be different and to showcase something different to the watching world... something that makes us attractive and pure and holy to those who are longing for something pure.²⁴

The fourth term on that list, "evil desire" is pretty broad and could also include sexual sin.²⁵ But the last two terms are different. Covetousness is the breaking of the tenth commandment.²⁶ God says, "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" (**Exod 20:17**). And Paul even goes a step further than the OT and calls covetousness idolatry.²⁷

How in the world could covetousness be equated with idolatry?²⁸ Well, idolatry involves elevating created things above the Creator.²⁹ And if you value the possessions of others to such an extent that you are unhappy with God and unhappy with what God has given you and are envious of others, this is a kind of sinful idolatry.³⁰ What's the cure for that? What's the cure for covetousness? The cure is contentment.³¹ The cure is gratefulness for what God has given you.

Now, can Christians fall into covetousness? Yes. Can Christians fall into idolatry? Yes, they can. Can Christians fall into πορνεία? Yes, they can. And Christ Jesus has paid for those sins. We're fighting a battle he's already won. And we need to kill those things. As we grow in Christ, we need to grow as assassins. And you need to kill the things that are killing you.

²⁴ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 218: "Probably it was revulsion against such an ethos which attracted many Gentiles to the stronger morality of Judaism. But the pressures of the wider society were such that the temptation for Gentile Christians to relapse must have been fairly constant (cf. 1 Corinthians 5–6)."

²⁵ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 220: "'Evil desires' (lit., 'evil desire,' ἐπιθυμίαν κακήν) can refer to sinful desires in general (e.g., Rom 6:12; 7:8; 13:14; Gal 5:16) but in this context also likely refers to illicit sexual passion (e.g., Rom 1:24; 1 Thess 4:5). This term serves as a transition to the last vice, as the relationship between 'evil desires' and 'covetousness' is made clear in Rom 7:7: 'I would not have known what coveting [ἐπιθυμίαν] really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'' (Rom 7:7; cf. Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21)."

²⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 215: "'Greed' (πλεονεξία), literally 'desire to have more' (πλέον-ἔχειν), so 'covetousness, avarice, insatiableness' (BAGD), 'consuming ambition' (C. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994] 3.117–19), 'ruthless greed' (NEB/REB), was generally recognized to be one of the most serious of vices, a threat to both individual and society (G. Delling, *TDNT* 6.266–70)."

²⁷ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 220: "Paul ends with the command against covetousness (cf. Exod 20:17; cf. Deut 5:21). In the OT, this tenth commandment properly concludes the Ten Commandments in two ways. First, it is obviously different from the previous ones in that it "deals with motivation rather than action," especially 'motivations behind the crimes ... of commandments six through nine.' Second, it points back to the first set of commandments since all the crimes reflected in these commandments find their roots in their refusal to worship the one true God and thus are forms of idolatrous practices."

²⁸ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 216: "'Greed' is a form of idolatry because it projects acquisitiveness and personal satisfaction as objective go(o)ds to be praised and served."

²⁹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 139–40: "When people sin, it is at its basis their doing what they desire, rather than what God desires. That is, in essence, to worship themselves instead of God, and that is idolatry. The Puritan Stephen Charnock wrote, 'All sin is founded in a secret atheism.... All the wicked inclinations in the heart ... are sparks from this latent fire; the language of every one of these is, 'I would be a Lord to myself, and would not have a God superior to me.'"

³⁰ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 97: "Whatever I put my trust in, I worship. Materialism is the true religion of thousands of confessing Christians today." MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 139: "Because it places selfish desire above obedience to God, greed amounts to idolatry. Covetousness is the root cause of all sin."

³¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 140: "The antidote for covetousness is contentment. A contented person will not desire to violate another person sexually, or covet anything that person owns. A person who can say with Paul, 'I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am' (Phil. 4:11), is not likely to struggle with covetousness. Contentment comes from trusting God... Contentment is the opposite of covetousness. Whereas the covetous, greedy person worships himself, the contented person worships God."

Write this down as a second point in your notes.

2) **Purge** the sinful practices of your **past** (3:7–8)

Look at **verse 7** with me. I think this verse alludes to both the list in **verse 5**, but also the list in **verse 8**.

⁷ In these you too once³² walked, when you were living in them

What are the “these” in **verse 7**? It’s the list of **verse 5**.

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

And to that, you might say, **“I’m killing it, Pastor Tony. I’ve been sexually pure since the late 1900s. I’ve been happily married to the same woman since Bill Clinton was president. No πορνεία. No covetousness. No idolatry.”**

Good. Praise God for that. If that’s not true of you this morning, then it’s time to kill your flesh. But for those of you who might congratulate yourself for the list in **verse 5**, how are you doing with the list in **verse 8**?

Paul says there,

⁸ But now you must put them all away:

Not just the really, really bad sins like the Gentiles who don’t know God. But also the “respectable sins.” Things like...

anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

How are you doing with those sins? Those things are earthly too. Those are the “these” of **verse 7** that you once walked in. But now you have been washed, you have been sanctified, you have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (**1 Cor 6:11**).

Let’s take a closer look at these “acceptable” sins and see if we can ferret out some stuff to kill.³³ First, let’s look at “anger” and “wrath.”³⁴ Those terms are interchangeable in the NT.³⁵ And you might notice that “wrath” was used earlier in **verse 6** to refer to God’s wrath. It’s the same word in Greek.

Why is God’s wrath a good and acceptable thing, while our wrath is not? The answer is because God’s wrath is derived from a perfect sense of justice and punishment. Our wrath is not.

James says in **James 1:19–20**, “[L]et every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” **Psalms 37:8** says, “Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.” Paul says elsewhere in **Romans 12:19**, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written [**Deut 32:35**], ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”

Now, the Bible does say, “Be angry, and do not sin” (**Eph 4:26**)... which leads me to believe that there is a space between no anger and sinful anger. Let’s just call that space “righteous indignation.” But just so you know, that is a pretty precarious place to be as a Christian. **In most cases of righteous indignation, you need to work to resolve that anger, you need to give that anger to God, or you need to forgive.**

And besides, I don’t think Paul is referencing any manifestation of righteous indignation in this verse. He’s referring to *unrighteous* indignation. And it’s the kind of indignation that finds an outlet in your mouth.

³² Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 222: “The contrast between their former lives and their present existence in Christ is highlighted by the temporal indicator ‘once’ (ποτε), which has already appeared in 1:21: ‘you were once [ποτε] alienated and hostile in mind through evil deeds.’”

³³ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 218–9: “In this case the vices named focus on personal relationships within the Christian community, warning against the outbursts particularly of careless or malicious speech that can be so damaging to community relations. Ὁργή is now human ‘wrath’ (in contrast to 3:6), with the implication that what is in view is such a powerful emotion that only God can be trusted to exercise it fairly.”

³⁴ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 219: “The two [ὀργή and θυμός] are almost synonymous, but θυμός probably indicates a more emotional response, ‘rage’ (NIV), ‘bad temper’ (REB), ‘quick temper’ (Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 145), ‘outbursts of anger’ (cf. Lightfoot 212).”

³⁵ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 224: “‘Anger’ (ὀργή) and ‘rage’ (θυμός) have overlapping semantic fields. In the LXX, they often refer to the wrath of God (e.g., Num 12:9; 14:34; 32:14; Deut 13:17 [LXX 13:18]; Josh 7:26; 2 Chr 28:11; Isa 5:25), and in Paul they also appear with other vice lists (Eph 4:31).”

Because look at the end of **verse 8**. I think that prepositional phrase, “from your mouth,” applies to all five of these vices.³⁶

*anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk*³⁷ from your mouth.

Jesus said from the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks (**Matt 12:34**).³⁸ And yes, sin resides in the heart even if it never makes it all the way to your mouth. But the mouth is the place where sin is demonstrated in the Christian community. And there is opportunity to kill sinful speech in between your heart and your mouth.³⁹

And Paul is encouraging that here. He says “put it away.” **As it emerges inside of you... as it flows from your heart to your mouth... Capture it. Remove it. Put it away.**

Put away “anger” and “wrath.” Put away also “malice,” the third item on that list. Malice is a general reference to any expressions of hate and vindictiveness. Christians should be characterized by love and grace and truth and forgiveness. That doesn’t mean that we don’t have a backbone. **I can’t stand it when Christians pretend that love and grace means that we have to condone evil. That is not what the Bible teaches. But we have to stand up for truth and righteousness and good without malice in our hearts.**

“Slander,” the fourth item on that list, is the Greek word βλασφημία (*blasphēmia*). And this could be a reference to blaspheming God, or a reference to slandering other human beings, or both. I think it’s probably both. And both of those are unbecoming of a Christian.⁴⁰ James says, “With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (**Jas 3:9–10**).

The final item on this second vice list is “obscene talk.” This could be translated “abusive speech.” I think both of those translations are possible. And I think both of those kinds of speech are unbecoming of a Christian. **Christians, as children of God, don’t get involved in coarse joking. They don’t make crude or demeaning jokes. And they don’t laugh at them either.**

Also, Christians don’t speak in hateful and derogatory ways towards others. They don’t engage in abusive speech towards their spouses, towards their children, towards other believers, towards unbelievers, towards their bosses at work, towards their governmental leaders, or towards their spiritual leaders.

Paul says here in verse 8, Purge from your mouth any...

anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk

Purge all of it!

“I’m feeling convicted, Pastor Tony.” Yeah, me too. You and me both need to take out our sniper rifles and kill these things that are killing us. We engage in moral mortal combat. We mortify the flesh!

³⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 263 interprets this verse slightly differently, although his application in the church community is essentially the same: “Determining the exact referents of the five items that follow depends, first, on deciding just what the concluding prepositional phrase, *from your lips*, modifies. (TNIV’s ‘lips’ translates Gk. *stoma*, ‘mouth,’ with ‘lips’ used to connote the speaking function of the mouth.) If it modifies the verb, then all the sins listed here will have to be, in some sense, sins of speech: ‘put away from your mouth all such things as these....’ *Anger, rage, and malice* will then refer to verbal expressions of these emotions rather than to the emotions themselves. But giving this extended meaning to these words does not have good lexical support. More likely, then, *from your lips* should be attached to the end of the list as a way of reinforcing the last two sins: ‘put off all these things: anger, rage, malice; and put away from your mouth *slander and filthy language*.’”

³⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 219: “Its meaning is clear from its construction: αἰσχρός, ‘shameful, obscene,’ λόγιον, ‘saying’—hence ‘obscene language, abusive speech’ (Lightfoot 212; BAGD), ‘dirty talk’ (JB/NJB), ‘filthy language’ (NIV).”

³⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 264: “Jesus reminds us that ‘the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart’ (Matt. 15:18), and it is this principle that undergirds v. 8.”

³⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 264: “Paul’s concern with the problem of critical speech (note also ‘do not lie’ in v. 9) suggests that Epaphras had told Paul that the false teachers had stirred up a certain amount of animosity and strife among the Colossian Christians themselves.”

⁴⁰ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 144: “When used in relation to God, it is translated ‘blasphemy.’ When used in relation to people, as here, it is translated ‘slander.’ To slander people, however, is to blaspheme God, inasmuch as He created men and women (cf. James 3:9).”

Don't take my word for it, take Jesus's word for it. "If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire" (Matt 18:8). Obviously Jesus is hyperbolizing there. He's not encouraging self-mutilation, he's encouraging flesh-mutilation.⁴¹ Kill the thing that is killing you. Kill the thing in you that Jesus Christ has already permanently killed for you. The war is won. Pick up a weapon and get in the battle.

Here's a way to think about this. Let me give you a grotesque and disturbing image, but hopefully it'll be helpful. We as Christians are new creatures in Christ Jesus. The old has gone, the new has come. It's amazing. And this is symbolized in baptism. We drowned the old self. We are raised to new life in the new self.

But on this side of eternity, before we've received new resurrection bodies, it's like our new body still grows these dead and dying zombie body parts. Because our sin nature still exists.

In fact, let me give some exegetical backing to this zombie analogy. In verse 5, I didn't mention this, but Paul literally says, "Put to death your members (or your body parts) that are on the earth."⁴² It's as if your new body still has these zombie body parts. And you've got to hack off those unalive necrotic members of your body.

And that's the Christian life until Christ calls you home. Someday you won't have to do this. Someday your flesh will be redeemed like the rest of you. Someday you will have resurrection bodies to merge with your resurrection souls. But that hasn't happened yet.

Coincidentally, Paul and the Colossian Christians have finished their race. I know we're reading their mail here this morning, but they've gone on to glory. And these imperatives to kill and put off don't apply to them anymore. They've run their race. They've finished in faith.

You and I, on the other hand, we've got to battle and fight and kill for just a little longer. Eternity is racing towards us. And our time to fight is right now.⁴³

Here's the third and final point in your notes. Here's some encouragement for you in this battle. Write this down.

3) Be **true** to yourself—the **redeemed** you (3:9–11)

Here's the encouragement... I don't ever want to get too far from this reality. You are becoming right now what you already are. You are fighting a battle that he's already won.

And so, when I say, "Be true to yourself" with this third point, I don't mean what most people mean. Most people use that cliché to say, "release your inhibitions. Just give in to the worst parts of your nature. If people don't like something about you, who cares?... You've got to be true to yourself."

But as a Christian, being true to yourself means being true to the real you, the redeemed you. You are becoming what you already are.

So, Paul says,

⁹ Do not lie to one another,

That's the third imperative in this passage. Kill the flesh. Put off the flesh. And don't lie to one another.

⁴¹ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 97: "As Alexander Maclaren said: 'It is far easier to cut off the hand, which after all is not me, than to sacrifice passions and desires which, though they be my worst self, are myself' (Alexander Maclaren, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*, The Expositor's Bible (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1903), p. 275)."

⁴² Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 219: "'Your ... parts' is commonly used in reference to body parts (see esp. 1 Cor 12:12–16). Since in Jewish traditions evil deeds are often related to the various parts of the body, some have taken 'your earthly parts' as referring to these various parts doing various types of sins. 'Your earthly parts' then refers to 'your limbs as put to earthly purposes.'"

⁴³ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 145: "How can we be victorious in our struggle with sin? First, by starving it. Do not feed anger or resentment. Do not cater to sexual lust or covetousness. Second, by crowding it out with positive graces: 'Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things' (Phil. 4:8)."

⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed⁴⁴ in knowledge after the image of its creator.⁴⁵

By the way, “one another” in Greek is ἀλλήλων (*allēlōn*), which is code for fellow believers. So Paul is saying here, **“Don’t lie to your fellow believers. Don’t pretend to be something you are not. You are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Act like it.”**

And according to **verse 10**, you are being renewed ... after the image of its creator.⁴⁶ In other words, you are being made more and more like Christ every day. You’ve put off the old self. And you have put on the new self.

A few weeks ago, I made an impulse buy on Amazon. For the first time in my life, I have gotten a case of soccer fever. And so I did what any respectable soccer fan would do, I bought a soccer jersey. And I didn’t buy a French jersey. And I didn’t buy an England jersey, even though Jude Bellingham is amazing. And I didn’t even buy a Croatian jersey. I bought a USA jersey, Christian Pulisic. Even though they got smoked by Belgium, I don’t care. That’s my team. That’s my country.

Whenever I’m in Croatia, visiting Sanja’s family, while we are watching soccer or the Olympics or whatever, I will inevitably break out into a chant of “USA. USA.” You can ask Sanja’s family about that. It’s intolerable to them. But I can’t help myself.

Listen, when you become a Christian, you take off the “child of wrath” jersey, and you put on the “child of God” jersey. You put off and put on. You belong to God. You represent God. You act like the Son of God. And you learn the ways of God.⁴⁷

Look again at **verse 10**,

¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Question—how are we being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator? We are being renewed by his Word. We are being renewed by the Spirit that indwells us. And the Spirit that indwells us is the same Spirit—the Holy Spirit—that wrote this book and performs that transformation inside of us.⁴⁸

And so, we have put on the “child of God” jersey and we are constantly being transformed into what we already are. God the Father sees us through the prism of his Son. And wouldn’t you know it, we are becoming more and more like his Son every day.

And every time you sin, you are not being true to who you are. Every time you engage in the vices of **verse 5** or the vices of **verse 8**, you are living a lie. You are deceiving yourself and others.

So Paul says here, **“Don’t live a lie.”**

⁹ Do not lie to one another,

And speaking of that “one another” community, look at **verse 11**.

¹¹ Here

In other words, “here” in the “one another” community ...

*there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 221: “The equivalent noun appears also first in Paul, in Rom. 12:2, to denote the ‘renewal of mind’ which Paul saw as integral to the ongoing transformation of the Christian and which was the key to being able to discern the will of God.”

⁴⁵ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 137: “Although believers are new creatures on the inside (2 Cor. 5:17), the new creatures live in old bodies. Thus our bodies can either be instruments for righteousness, or for iniquity.”

⁴⁶ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 227: “In Paul, the renewal of believers is often the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; cf. Eph 3:16). If so, God calls believers to put on the new humanity created by his new creative act through his Son, and the Spirit continues to work through them as they grow into what has been prepared for them.”

⁴⁷ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 150: “The flesh will continually dangle the garments of the old self in front of the new man and urge him to put them on.”

⁴⁸ AUGUSTINE: “This is why we say the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit lusts against the flesh. But this is also why ‘it is being renewed day by day,’ for the soul does not fail to make progress in virtue as it gradually diminishes the carnal desires to which it does not consent.” Quoted in Gorday, ed. *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 47.

⁴⁹ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 99: “The ‘new self,’ lived out, brings the destruction of *racial* barriers (‘Greek or Jew’), *religious* barriers (‘circumcised or uncircumcised’), *cultural* barriers (‘barbarian, Scythian’), and *social* barriers (‘slave or free’).”

Not only are you in Christ, but Christ is in you. Not only do you put on the new self, but the new self is generated inside of you. You are being true to what you truly are. You are being true to yourself—your redeemed self. You are becoming what you already are. And you are not alone in that. You’ve got a whole team of Jews, Gentiles, etc. who are right there alongside of you!

If I can go back to the American soccer team for a moment. Some of our players that played this year in the World Cup are foreign born. And some of our players were born in the States. Some of our players are black. Some are white. Some are Hispanic. Some are of European descent. Some are of non-European descent. But none of that matters when they put on that jersey. Because in doing that, they represent America.

When you become a Christian, it’s not as if your ethnicity or your gender or your background are eliminated altogether. But those things are subsumed under your identity as a Christian. You are no longer a Jew first. You are a Christian Jew or a Messianic Jew. You are no longer a Greek or a Gentile first. You are a Christian. Your Hispanic-ness is eclipsed by your Christian-ness. Your Scotch-Irishness is eclipsed by your Christian-ness. Your racial affiliation and your national affiliation are secondary. Christ is primary.

By the way, the pairings here in **verse 11** are wild. Paul compares Greek and Jew, which was not uncommon in the NT world. That happened a lot in churches. Many, if not most, of the churches that Paul planted in the Roman Empire were multiethnic. The predominant expression of that was churches composed of both Jews and Gentiles—which was a radical thing in the first century world. Many people probably assumed that was an impossibility. **“Jews and Gentiles worshipping together in the church? Impossible!”** Paul didn’t think so.

And the next pairing is similar. There were circumcised Gentiles and uncircumcised Gentiles. Did a Gentile need to be circumcised in order to be part of the church family? No. Paul’s dealt with that already. And he’s reinforcing that here.

The third and the fourth pairing here are even more shocking—“Barbarian” and “Scythian.” See that in **verse 11**? Barbarians were not just Gentiles, but heathen Gentiles who could barely speak the language. And Scythians weren’t just Gentiles... and they weren’t just barbarian Gentiles... they were uber-barbarian Gentiles! They were the scourge of the earth in that culture.

Scythians were from north of the Black Sea, in what is today modern Ukraine and Russia.⁵⁰ And in the ancient world, they were infamous for their cruelty and inhumanity.⁵¹ The Greek historian Herodotus said that they would drink the blood of their enemies.⁵² The Jewish historian Josephus said that Scythians were little better than wild beasts.⁵³

And Paul is saying here, **“I don’t care how heathen their culture is. I don’t care how far removed they are from Judeo-Christian ethics or even Greco-Roman ethics. They can put on Christ Jesus and become part of the Christian family. Any and every human being is redeemable.”**

And by the way, we don’t have tiers or castes in the Christian faith like other religions. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. And we all put on the same jersey.⁵⁴

And that’s not just true for Barbarians and Scythians, that’s also true of slave and free.⁵⁵

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

⁵⁰ Also Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Romania.

⁵¹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 228: “‘Scythian’ points to the inhabitants north of the Black Sea. The Scythians were often considered to be an extreme example of ‘barbarian’ (i.e., ‘the lowest type of barbarian’).”

⁵² See the quotation in MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 152.

⁵³ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 225–6: “Their name was synonymous with crudity, excess, and ferocity: Σκύθης, ‘Scythian,’ had the metaphorical sense of ‘rude, rough person,’ and the verb σκυθίζω, ‘behave like a Scythian,’ meant both ‘drink immoderately’ and ‘shave the head’ (from the Scythian practice of scalping their dead enemies; LSJ; O. Michel, *TDNT* 7.448). Josephus no doubt cites the common view when he refers to Scythians as ‘delighting in murder of people and little different from wild beasts’ (*Contra Apionem* 2:26; see also Lightfoot 216–17).”

⁵⁴ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 151: “Just as individual believers put off the habits of the old self, so also the church puts off the old barriers that separated people. There is no place for racial barriers or cultural snobbery.”

If you remember, Onesimus, the slave, was part of this contingent of believers coming to Colossae from Paul who was in prison in Rome. Onesimus was a runaway slave of Philemon. And the church was (probably) meeting in Philemon's house. And Paul is making a point here of saying, **"Philemon, you are no different from Onesimus. You are both children of God. You both play for the same team."**

And you are both assassins. You are both killers. Help each other kill the flesh. Help each other to νεκρώω.

There's a really precious moment in Christian history, at the turn of the third century when a young mother named Perpetua was brought before the Roman rulers and refused to renounce Christ as her Savior. All she had to do was offer up a simple sacrifice to the Roman Emperor. But she refused. And so, they threw her to the wild beasts and gladiators in the colosseum.

But she didn't go alone. Perpetua was joined in the Roman colosseum by her slave, Felicitas, who was also her faithful Christian sister in Christ. And those two women died side by side, not as a free woman and her slave, but as daughters of God and believers in Christ Jesus.⁵⁶ There Christian-ness trumped everything else about them including their status as slave and free.

And here we are two thousand years later. We don't have slaves and free here in San Antonio, Texas in 2026. Praise God for that. We only have free.

And by the way, I would encourage you to explore that matter historically, because slavery was a universal, human phenomenon. And Christians did more than anyone else to bring an end to slavery. I'll talk more about that in a few weeks.

Also, we don't have barbarians and Scythians in our world today. Not really. But we do have diversity. We do have Jews and Gentiles. We do have different ethnic and socio-economic categories represented here in our church and in the church universal throughout the world. Praise God for that! Heaven, by the way, is going to be an amazingly diverse and multiethnic experience. See the book of Revelation for more on that (Rev 5:9; 7:9). And in that way we are diverse.

But in this way, we are not. There are only two teams, there are only two destinies for humanity in the afterlife. You are either a child of God or a child of wrath. Which one are you?

For those of you who are on team Jesus, here are your marching orders in Colossians 3, and here are your teammates. The task is simple. Fight the good fight of faith. Press on through the challenges of life. Kill the flesh. Put away the sinful habits of your past. And be true to yourself and the others who represent Jesus Christ with you.

Thankfully you don't have to fight this fight alone. And thankfully you don't have to fight this fight for very long. Soon and very soon our fight in this life will be over. Soon and very soon the battle will end. So stay after it. And put to death that what is earthly in you.

⁵⁵ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 226: "Apart from ethnic differences (and gender differences in Gal. 3:28), the difference between slave and free was the other most fundamental division in society. Up to a third of those living in a city like Colossae may have been slaves. Slavery had not yet come to be thought of as immoral or necessarily degrading (it took the slave trade to bring this insight home to Western "civilization"). It was simply the means of providing labor at the bottom end of the economic spectrum (originally from the ranks of defeated enemies, but by now mainly through birth to slaves)."

⁵⁶ See Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 362–3.