

Christian Living, from Colossians #1

Colossians follows the same pattern as many other NT epistles, by starting out with doctrinal truths (chapters 1 and 2), and then moving on to the more practical matters of Christianity (chapters 3 and 4). That is, how we are to live together in peace and a good witness, and function together to bring people into God's kingdom. I love to learn and teach doctrine, but if we only have doctrine without the practical side of Christianity, life will appear dry and unappealing to others. There must be a balance between believing rightly, and living rightly. Either one alone is incomplete.

In these lessons we will skip over chapters 1 and 2, and get into Paul's practical instructions, starting in chapter 3.

Colossians 3:1-5 – Living the “Crucified Life”

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; ...”

In the last lesson we learned about water baptism, which from Rom. 6 is seen to be a symbolic picture of our dying to our old life, being buried with Christ in baptism, and then coming up in new life, now dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Here in Col. 3, we see much the same: the old man is dead, we are risen with Christ, and we now have real life in Christ. Because of this, Paul gives us certain instructions:

- **Seek those things that are above.** Our ambitions, purposes, and goals should be of the things in eternity, in God's presence, not the temporal things of this life. Like Abraham, we seek a heavenly and eternal city. We should ask ourselves, “What am I seeking, a life in this world, or in the next?”
- **Set your affection on heavenly things**, not earthly. What are you setting your affection on? Things? People? Christ? What, and whom do you really love? Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”
- **Mortify your members here on earth.** That is, put to death every sinful desire and practice, the very things you used to delight in. Even needs, desires, and pleasures that are not by nature sinful must be controlled and held in check. We obviously have earthly goals, like to get a house, to get out of debt, to marry, to enjoy life with the grandkids, to get a better job, etc., but we should always see these as temporary and minor goals, suited to this life only. In fact we should be willing to sacrifice these goals altogether, if necessary to maintain a faithful testimony and witness, and in the end to hear God say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

What is meant by “the crucified life”? Mt. 16:24 says “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Lk. 14:27 says “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” What is a cross for, but to die on? Paul said “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31). Obviously we cannot physically die daily, but it means that we are to die out to our own desires, plans, goals, and purposes, as Christ had to do when he went to his cross. We must daily make the decision to live for Christ alone, and then act on that. Pride and self-will must die. We forsake all to follow him.

Colossians 3:5, 8-9 – What are We Supposed to “Mortify”? (to mortify means to put to death)

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ... But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;”

- **Fornication** – In the Greek the word is “porneion”, which means fornication, or illicit sexual intercourse. This includes premarital sex (really, any intercourse out of marriage), as well as adulterous intercourse. It can also include activities that are not exactly intercourse, but perverted and unnatural sex.

It is easy to see the relation between the Greek word “porneion” and “pornography”. While some would no doubt say that indulging in pornography is not really fornication, it obviously is filling their minds with thoughts of fornication, and that with total strangers. It is treating sex as purely a physical and impersonal thing, totally separate from any love, trust, or commitment in a personal relationship. They are committing fornication constantly in their minds. It is degrading the purity of the sexual aspect of marriage, it treats partners as nothing more than objects to fulfill lust, it opens oneself to venereal diseases, it becomes a huge burden on the conscience (at least it should), and it becomes an almost insurmountable barrier to trust between man and wife.

In the early days of the NT it was not really different than today, in that heathen unregenerates engage in serial fornication so much they don't even see anything wrong with it. Some women have had sex with so many men that when they become pregnant they have no idea who the father is, and maybe not even the names of who their "partners" have been. The men are just as promiscuous and guilty, it is just that they don't bear the pregnancy. Unfortunately, to the sin of fornication they often add murder by abortion.

When people like that get saved, they may not even realize that this behavior is totally unacceptable to God. Why else would the church have to tell Gentile converts to "abstain from fornication" (Ac. 15:29)? Why does Paul have to say in 1 Cor. 6:18 to "flee fornication"? Why does Jesus rebuke church members in Pergamos (Rev. 2:14) and Thyatira (Rev. 2:20) for committing fornication? One would think that the sin of fornication is so obviously wicked that it would have been one of the grossest of the sins that brought a person to repentance in the first place. Unfortunately we know by experience and by these places in the Bible, that even born again Christians must be told, DO NOT COMMIT FORNICATION.

- **Uncleanness** – While people often wrongly quote the Bible as saying "Cleanliness is next to godliness", the OT certainly spoke a lot about physical uncleanness, and to live in physical uncleanness would seem to be a symptom of other problems – sloth, greed, disrespect for others and for oneself, etc. Yet the meaning here is not just sloppiness or stinkiness, but moral impurity as evidenced by our actions, or even of motives. We often speak of someone having a dirty mind, or a potty mouth, meaning moral uncleanness.
- **Inordinate Affection** – The word means passion, but Thayer's Greek Lexicon describes it in such a context as vile or depraved passions. Passion itself is not necessarily evil, because you can have a passion for witnessing, or helping the poor, or for true worship, indeed we should have a real passion for God. But in Col. 3:5 it obviously means passion in a bad sense – passion for pursuing and doing evil.
- **Evil Concupiscence** – Thayer's lexicon describes concupiscence as a desire for what is forbidden, but the Greek verse adds the word for "evil" to further qualify it. To desire what is forbidden is evil, just like it was in Eden.
- **Covetousness** – This is an illegitimate desire to have something that is not your own (commandment #10 – your neighbor's house, wife, servants, ox, ass, or anything else belonging to them). But besides the desire for someone else's belongings, it can also apply to a greedy and constant desire for more. If we have right hearts, God gives us, not only what we need, but the ability to appreciate and be thankful for his provisions. But the danger is that as we begin accumulating things, we see them as ends in themselves, and they become our masters. We can become enslaved, not just to possessions, but to desires – "Yes, I have this, but I need that. I have 100 but I need 200." This is why he warns that such desire can become idolatry – we are desiring, serving, and in effect worshipping created things instead of the Creator and Giver of good things.
- **Anger, Wrath** – We may wonder at the difference between these two because they seem almost synonymous. Thayer's says that the word for anger is for that anger which arises gradually and "settles in", whereas the word for wrath denotes anger that boils up suddenly and then subsides.
- **Malice** – This is that form of ill will that contains a desire to injure another, to "get them", to "do them wrong" either by direct action or by scheming.
- **Blasphemy** – Although we ordinarily apply this to words against God, it is actually slanderous talk meant to besmirch someone's name or character.
- **Filthy Communication out of the Mouth** – The use of foul, obscene, or shameful words. Hollywood and the media have been on a crusade for at least 40-50 years to lower the bar of civil discourse, and to make foul and profane language seem normal and acceptable. We constantly hear the "F" word, which is revolting.
- **Lying** – This seems straight forward. It is to tell a lie or to deceive someone. A really effectual liar can do it by implication, or by leading someone to believe something, without actually telling the falsehood directly. It is the same thing, and God hates liars (see Prov. 6:16-19).

Rev. 21:8 – "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Brethren, these things should never be allowed in our lives. Put them to death, and live to God in righteousness.

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