

Paul's Letter to the Colossians
Week 4
Colossians 3:5-25

Day One

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

v. 5 – We are instructed to put to death the deeds of our earthly nature. We cannot do this in our own strength, but only with the help of the Spirit of God.

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:12-14).

Paul told us in Romans that we put to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit. For example, I remember once how I struggled with my supervisor at work. God began to convict me of my attitude, yet I seemed powerless to change it. Finally one day I said, “Lord, I cannot do this. I give you permission to change me. I need Your help.” And He did! I went from resenting that man to serving and even loving him. I cooperated with and invited the work of the Spirit in accordance with this verse, yet it was the work of the Spirit that changed me.

Before we move on, notice that Paul equated greed with idolatry. When you are greedy for money, you are setting money as your god. You are exercising energy to get money and keep it. You give that money honor and it makes you feel good. The same can be true of relationships, power, position, or control. You can desire them so badly that they become what you pursue instead of God. Idols aren't only statues that you bow down and worship, they are anything that commands the allegiance in your life that only God should have. **Do you have any idols in your life?** Don't answer too quickly.

v. 6 – God is often patient where sin is concerned, not because He condones the sin, but because He desires that people repent:

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:4).

God's wrath comes on all sin and only the sacrifice of blood of Jesus can appease that wrath. That is why it is so critical that you run to avail yourself of that blood whenever you sin.

v. 7 – Oscar Wilde once said, “Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future!” That is so profound and true. Every saved person once walked in sin, whether or not they were

involved in gross sin. I have often prayed that the Lord would not let me forget that, so I don't judge or act condescendingly to sinners. I was once where they are and, but for the grace of God, would still be there. **Are you mindful of your past before Christ, not to dwell on it, but to help you appreciate God's grace and the dilemma of the sinner?**

Day Two

8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

v. 8 – Paul was specific in verses five and now eight about the behaviors that needed to go in the believer's life. There can be no room for error or debate as to what is expected of a Christian from Paul's instruction. It isn't just that the "major" sins like sexual immorality, but also internal issues like anger, slander and inappropriate speech (remember Jesus said that out of the heart the mouth speaks – see Matthew 15:18). Paul ordered the Colossian believers to clean house and get rid of those sins. **How do you rate yourself in regards to the things Paul listed: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language? Do you have any Spirit-assisted work to do in those areas of your life?**

Notice that all the things mentioned in verse eight are sins against other people. Paul was not writing to isolated Christians, but to Christians in community with one another. They had to learn how to behave with one another so that they did not injure each other.

vs. 9&10 – Another practice that had to go was lying to one another. This belonged to the old self but had no part in the new. **How are you doing with telling the truth? Do you exaggerate?** Notice Paul says that the believer has *already* taken off the old self and needed to act accordingly. Once the new self is put on through faith in Christ and baptism, then the believe needs to align his or her behavior with the facts that the new self requires new attitudes and actions.

Someone likened this process to a Japanese soldier isolated on a remote island who did not hear that World War II was over. He continued to fight until one day someone landed and brought him the news. Sin is like that Japanese fighter who has to be informed that the old has passed and the new has come. Then that fighter, like the new self, has to adjust his behavior to those new facts. You need to inform your old self that you are a new creature in Christ and must behave accordingly.

As stated earlier, however, this new behavior cannot be achieved in your own strength. You need the help of the Spirit, as Paul explained in Romans (see above). Your new self is growing and renewing in the knowledge and understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God.

v. 11 – There is no discrimination toward anyone created in the image of God. We are all the same even though we look different and have a different national culture. Yet in Christ we are one. The expectations are the same across the board. The focus is never to be on the redeemed but on the Redeemer. And the behaviors are to be uniform among all believers with no exceptions. **Do you recognize that we are all one in Christ? Or do you maintain distinctions according to race or national origin?** Don't answer too quickly.

Day Three

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

v. 12 – It is never enough to put off the old man and behavior. A believer must put on new behaviors to replace the old. We should be known for our compassion, kindness and gentleness. Those should be our garments as we put them on and wear them for the world to see. This same concept of off-with-the-old-and-in-with-the-new is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-25).

I always try to allow Scripture to explain Scripture whenever possible; that is why I quoted Galatians above.

v. 13 – **Why would Paul admonish us to love and forgive one another unless we were going to need that reminder again and again?** Forgiveness is expressed as an event but it is to be a way of life, repeated over and over again as needed. We are to forgive just as the Lord forgave and forgives us. I have had people say that they have forgiven someone but the bitter or resentful feelings come back again and again. They ask what they should do. That is an easy answer; forgive as often as necessary until it is finalized

in your own heart and mind. Don't be confounded or confused by how long it may take, just be obedient and keep forgiving.

v. 14 – As we saw in an earlier study, as quoted from First Corinthians, love is supreme. It is the crowning quality that ties together forgiveness, compassion and gentleness. This kind of love, however, must be supernatural and can only come from Christ dwelling in the believer. **Do you have that kind of love, and do you express it to those around you, especially the members of God's household of faith?**

Day Four

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

v. 15 – The peace of Jesus should serve as a referee or umpire in your life and behavior. This peace is beyond understanding as Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).

There are times when you only have God's peace *after* you have obeyed Him and not before. You must obey no matter how you feel but, once you have, you will sense God's presence and peace in an outstanding way. This peace should prevail not only in your individual life but also in our community life. One sign peace prevails is that we are thankful to God for who we are and what we have in Him. I think the thanksgiving should also overflow to and for one another. **Are you thankful? Is there peace and harmony in your relationships? If not, what can you do to obtain it?**

v. 16 – Your thanksgiving should flow into singing and worship. It should also be present as you teach and admonish one another. If you are thankful, you will not condemn others or speak down to them. You will treat them as equals and work with one another in love. This will happen when God's word dwells richly in us and we can reference godly wisdom from the Word when we need it – and we will definitely need it when we are working with our brothers and sisters. The thing to remember is that they will need it when dealing with you too, for you are at times as weak and difficult as anyone else can be.

Some people have tried to distinguish between the various musical references here – psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. I may be wrong, but I think they are splitting hairs.

They are synonyms for musical expressions of thanks to God as we serve His people. We serve God's people and give God thanks – that is a great formula for peace, happiness and success.

v. 17 – This formula seems pretty straightforward and simple. We should give thanks to God in all we do and do it just like we were doing it for Jesus. That will certainly keep us from grumbling and complaining and maintain the peace that Paul wanted us to have. This is the third mention of thanksgiving in this section of Paul's letter. **Do you think the apostle was trying to stress the importance of being grateful? So with that kind of emphasis, do you think you have adequate levels of thanks and gratitude in your heart and life? Perhaps you should make a concerted effort with God's help to be more mindful of what God has done for you in Christ so that you can always give thanks?**

Day Five

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

v. 18 – A wife is to be submissive to her husband as is fitting in the Lord. **Does this mean that she must obey him in every instance?** Absolutely not! **What if a husband wanted her to do something illegal or immoral. Would she obey?** Absolutely not! Yet she would submit to the repercussions for not obeying. **Should a wife submit to an abusive husband who does her physical harm?** Absolutely not!

I know of wives who earn their own money but their husbands “forbid” them from giving to the church. **Should they obey?** Absolutely not! **Should they submit to the husband's displeasure or even anger over her “disobedience”?** Absolutely! When I think of submission in the sense I am describing, I think of the story in Acts 4:24-31. Those in authority forbid the apostles from preaching, but they did not obey. There were more than willing, however, to submit to their punishment for obeying God rather than man. **Does this make sense to you?**

It is my contention that we have put a burden on godly women that God did not intend and have caused spiritual women to suffer and be unfruitful in their purpose as they submit to dull and unspiritual husbands.

v. 19 – I think we have been much quicker to require women to submit than we have to require men not to be harsh with their wives. Jesus is the husband of His bride, the Church. Just think of how Jesus treats the Church and you have a guide for how husbands should treat their wives. I have been guilty of harshness toward my wife on many occasions and my tendency goes all the way back to the Garden.

“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3:16).

Woman's fallen state leads her to want a man to dominate her; man's fallen state leads him to fulfill that wish and dominate women. That is the source of much tension in marriages and it plays out in society as well.

v. 20 – Now the Bible is clear that children are to obey in everything, yet at some point the children must grow up and establish their own households. I do a lot of work in Africa where it is part of many cultures for parents to maintain some measure of control over children no matter how old the children are. I don't believe this verse was referring to that practice. At some point, a man leaves and cleaves as Scripture doesn't just recommend but commands!

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

v. 21 – A husband's harshness that he exerts over his wife can carry over to his relationship with the children. A father is to discipline his children but not in a manner that makes them bitter and resentful. It is always with a view toward seeing that the child has a godly attitude or behavior and not just to have the child please the whims of his or her father. There are many who could never please their fathers and this has led to discouragement, which the child even carries into adulthood. Fatherhood is a powerful force in a child's life. Used properly it can be a tremendous blessing; used improperly, it can inflict wounds and scars that remain for a long time.

What is your role in life at this point – husband, wife or child? How are you doing in that role according to the directives of these four verses? Are you submitting, loving and/or obeying? Where can you ask God's help for improvement?

Days Six and Seven

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

v. 22 – This verse cannot mean that a "slave" should have done something immoral at the direction of the master. God's law is higher than any of man's laws or customs. The emphasis here would be on sincere and honorable service in whatever role the slave would have held. Paul did not want the slaves just to be obedient while someone was watching, but also while no one was watching. In reality, of course, God would be watching and Paul wanted the slaves to have a heart to serve the Lord and not just to win approval or favors from their owner.

Much has been made today that Paul did not address the issue of slavery in his letters. I believe he did in Philemon, yet Paul was not a social reformer. He was a religious

reformer and a prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets. He was more concerned about establishing the Kingdom of God, confident that once it was established, it would increase and impact all aspects of any culture.

vs. 23&24 – I have taken the principles in these verses and applied them to modern work ethics. I substitute the word “employees” for “slaves” to teach men and women how to be good Christian workers. If you don’t like a job, you can quit or look for another one, but as long as you are being paid to work, then you must work for that company or supervisor as unto the Lord. That means that you don’t just do the minimum, but look for ways to go beyond expectations. **Are you working with all your heart where you are? If not, why not? Can you see that if you aren’t, you need to repent?** You are not working for your company; you are working for God. He is your Employer and He pays you. You owe Him excellent work every day.

- If you get this attitude right, God will be the One to reward you with meaningful work and financial blessing. The Wisdom Books have many things to say about work that can help you reform your modern approach to work and see it from God’s perspective:
- He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment (Proverbs 12:11).
- From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him (Proverbs 12:14).
- All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty (Proverbs 14:23).
- The laborer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on (Proverbs 16:26).
- One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys (Proverbs 18:9).
- The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work (Proverbs 21:25).
- Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men (Proverbs 22:29).
- He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty (Proverbs 28:19).
- A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God (Ecclesiastes 2:24).

- So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him? (Ecclesiastes 3:22).
- Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work (Ecclesiastes 4:9).
- Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God (Ecclesiastes 5:19).
- So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun (Ecclesiastes 8:15).
- Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

As you review those verses from the wisdom literature, what did you find that you can apply to your work right now?

v. 25 – Work did not come as a result of the Fall of man. God gave Adam work to do and Adam’s sin complicated work but did not create the concept of work. Therefore, God takes work seriously because it was His idea, just like marriage. Therefore anyone who doesn’t embrace God’s concept of work, excellence and productivity is missing a big part of his or her purpose. The context of this verse tells you that God will punish anyone who refuses to follow His plan for joyful and cooperative work and work relationships. **Are you a good worker? Do you resent or honor your company or supervisor? If you are a supervisor, are you a good leader according to God’s standards?**