

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

"Pursuing God With Our Will: Putting Off" Colossians 3:5-11

Well, as you remember, we are in Colossians Chapter 3. Today we will be looking at verses 5 to 11. As we've gotten this far, we've gone through Colossians 1, which grounded the church in truth. The truth of who Christ is. He's the Creator of all and what He did; He reconciled all men to Himself. That's really fundamental. If we are going to pursue holiness, we have to start with the person who worked with Christ and to respond to the true God for His work in our lives.

Then in Colossians Chapter 2, we were guarded against error. The persuasions of empty philosophies and deceptions, the many ways the world brings to us the man-made rules, the mystical experiences that try to pretend to solve the problem of sin and make our lives better, but fail.

Colossians 3 deals with how to grow in relation to God. Our sin should be dealt with as God intended it to be dealt with in Colossians Chapter 3. That really is the only solution to the problems we have with evil in life. So, as we look at this, we have to recognize that pursuing God requires our whole being.

Last week we looked at our heart and our mind. We pursue the Lord with our heart because He has raised us up with Christ. We are no longer destined to eternal destruction but we have been raised up with the Lord. And so we have the heart to keep seeking Him with the things above. We should set our minds on the things above not on the things on earth. This reason is given in verse 3 "you have died and your life is hidden with God in Christ." That is a fact and hopefully, you will understand and appreciate this fact and you will respond to it. No longer living for yourself but for Him who died and rose again on your behalf. When you set your mind on the things above, not on the things on earth, when you are committed to pursuing the Lord with your heart and your mind, you are set up to do now what this next section will teach, growing in relation to God.

1. How to consider ourselves in our cravings (3:5-7)

There is still one thing missing though. We have to pursue the Lord with our heart, we have to pursue the Lord with our mind but we also need to pursue the Lord with our will. We have to make a choice. Now, if we are not setting our mind on the things above, if we are not pursuing Him with our whole heart then we are in a poor position to make good choice. If we are setting our minds on the things above, if we are seeking the things above with our heart, we are in a better position to make a choice. But we still have to make the choice. We can legitimately say for everyone here today that you are as close to God as you've chosen to be. You may not be as close to God as you'd like to be or you'd hoped to be. But you are as close to the Lord as you have chosen to be. So as you pursue the Lord with your heart, as you pursue the Lord with your mind, setting your mind on the things above, we need to make the decision. We need to follow through with that to put off sin and put on righteousness. We must pursue God with our will and that will be what we will start to talk about today.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

We will just look today at putting off sin, turning away from sin and how this occurs. So let's look at verses 5-7. I will read this to you and will discuss how to consider ourselves in our cravings and desires within us from Colossians 3:5-7, *“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him-- a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.”*

So this is our call, to consider our members of our earthly bodies as dead to immorality, impurity and the list of things. What is dead? A dead person cannot respond to anything. You poke a dead person and nothing happens, they are unresponsive. This is what you should be. You should think of yourself as dead to immorality, any sins, unresponsive. Because your life is now Christ and His life is now you. And because of that you have no desire to pursue the things of this world because you will see it for what it is, empty, deceptive, meaningless, and to reckon yourself to have no feelings towards your cravings. That's what verse five says. That is the method that God gives to overcoming sin. Consider yourself dead to sin, to immorality, to impurity.

Now as you look at this list of things given in verse five, this is an interesting list. As dead to immorality, the NIV puts it sexual immorality, which is the best translation because that is really the type of immorality this is focused on--sexual immorality. Any activity, actions that are of a sexual nature that are outside marriage. It is God's plan for sexual activity to be within the confines of marriage. So, when we go outside of marriage for that, we are immoral.

But there's other things here. Impurity, which is uncleanness; it's descriptive of immorality.

Passion is translated lust. It's that inward desire, that impure inward desire toward immorality that is evil; the heart that seeks after the actions of immorality.

Then, evil desire is a broader term. It's the same heart desire but not specifically directed toward lust nor of a sexual nature. It's much broader than that.

Then, greed is beyond that. It's selfishness, which is a good way to translate that. It's not a financial selfishness in nature (though it is, partly) but it is our core selfishness.

Then the last phrase, “which amounts to idolatry,” is not only connected to greed but grammatically is connected to all these things that are listed in verse five.

So to try to picture this. This immorality is like the outside of the egg. It's our actions but the actions are coming as a result of things within us, impurity, passion, evil desires, greed, and the core being idolatry. Idolatry is the core attitude of selfishness, putting our self on the throne rather than Christ on the throne of our life.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

We have a choice, are we going to live for ourselves, are we going to look out for our interest, or are we going to put Christ interests on the throne of our lives? So, this core of idolatry manifests itself in verse five outwardly, ultimately into immorality.

But, it can manifest itself in other ways, too. In fact, any sin you can think of has at its core, idolatry. If you go and take off the layers you get down to the heart attitude and the heart attitude, which is where the real change needs to take place, is all in regard to selfishness and ultimately idolatry.

So if we see it for what it is, really an affront to God, not just harm to someone else, and if we see it as worshiping ourselves rather than the Lord, then we will respond more vigorously against these evil attitudes and actions.

This is, incidentally, one reason why our ministries are not centered around specific types of sinful behavior. We have small groups in our fellowship, but we don't have a small group fellowship that is meeting with regard to this sin only and another small group that meets with regard to that sinful behavior. It's because all of our sin really centers around idolatry and selfishness and that change of our heart can take ourselves off the throne of our heart and put the Lord onto the throne of our heart, is the means by which heart change will occur and then will result in ending sinful immorality or whatever these sinful practices are.

So, consider yourself dead, put yourself off the throne, and put Christ on the throne of your life. Be unresponsive to sin.

There are a couple of more reasons why we should be no longer practicing immorality or any sin that is resulting from selfish idolatry. Verse six says this, essentially, we must recognize God's feelings about our cravings when it says, *"For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come."*

God has feelings about these sin practices and He feels so strongly about these sin practices that He is willing to do something about it one day. The wrath of God will come. Now, those who are believers in Christ, the wrath of God will not abide on us. We have been forgiven of God's wrath. But God's wrath is coming because of sin, not just because He needs to come back but He's coming back to fix everything. In His wrath, He will judge sin and bring holiness.

So if we remember God's feeling about our cravings, we will live desiring less to have those feelings. Thirdly, we must remember our former feelings for our cravings. That's verse seven, *"and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them."*

Now, hopefully, you, like me, can think back of the things you have done that are sinful and remember how you felt. Remember what you desired before you sinned, and then you can remember what happened after you sinned and realize that it didn't turn out as well as you thought it was going to. When you started to pursue sin and had an attitude within yourself to be sinning in, whatever way that was, it looked so good for you, it looks like it's going to somehow help you, but then on the back end of things you find that it didn't help me it only made my life worse and it really was deceptive.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Well, if we remember that process that happened, then we also walked in there [in sin] that we were living there [in sin] but no longer should we be responding to that because we know better. We've learned by our trial and error that this works so badly, it's very destructive, and there's no sense of responding to the urgings of sin because it leads to the bad things.

We should be turning away from those things by remembering our former feelings, by remembering God's feelings, and reckoning that we have no feelings to these cravings because we will see it for what it is. It's deceptive; it does not satisfy. Sin will not satisfy our desires. The Lord, being in a relationship with Him, will only satisfy our desires. Don't be deceived.

2. How to conduct ourselves in our conversation (3:8-10)

Not just how to conduct ourselves in our cravings but in our conversations. Our speech patterns, how we communicate. Verses 8-10 speak to this and I will read this:

“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--”

So, in verse 8 we see a list of things.

a. What speech must be put aside.

The speech that is given to be put aside starts with anger and then works out from there, anger to wrath, from wrath to malice, malice to slander, from slander to abusive speech. It builds outwardly.

In the center is our anger and if we leave our anger unchecked it will manifest itself. Sometimes you can be angry and no one will ever know you are angry. But often we give expression to anger and as we speak out in anger then that's wrath. That's what wrath is; it's the expression given to anger. After wrath, if that desire for wrath is intended to hurt somebody, that's malice. Some people's outbursts of anger are intended to hurt; this sin is called malice. Slander is malice but a specific type of malice. It is when we say something that is untrue about someone for the purpose of hurting them. It is an untruth to damage their reputation. That's what slander is. Then, ultimately we have a catchall area called abusive speech. I think the NIV puts this as filthy language. It's that and more. It is speech practices that are unclean and hurt people wantonly to abuse people in their speech patterns.

So, hopefully as you mature, as you seek to battle the temptation to be angry. You will not let your anger spill out, hurting people, slandering people. You will be able to mature and control that.

But if the Lord is really on the throne of your heart, you will be able to overcome even anger. It's this way, when we are angry it's because our desires are not being accomplished. We somehow feel like our attitudes, our desires, our interests, are being thwarted.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

When those trials come our way, how should we respond? James 1:2 says it clearly: “*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials*”

So, when trials come your way, to thwart the desires and the plans that you have, you should not respond in anger. You should respond with joy. You can do this because you can see that God is bigger than the trial. God is bigger than the thing that is causing you to be angry. You can see that you should have joy because that is an opportunity for growth and maturity and to actually be joyful. So that heart attitude becomes not anger, but actual joy because you can see the situation truthfully for what it is, an opportunity for you to grow and mature.

Rather than just one desire that you have that’s being thwarted, instead certainly God can work out His will if He desires. He’s allowing your desire to be thwarted and you see that you can have confidence and trust in Him.

Now, in this list in verse 9 there is one that is somewhat separated out from the others. It says, “*do not lie to one another.*” Now lying, although it deserves a sermon all by itself, simply put, is any intent to deceive. So, if we are seeking to deceive someone, that’s what this is and this is a separate category because anger and its manifestations divide relationships. This divides relationships in a different sort of way and this relational unity is a sub-plot in chapter 3. Lying destroys unity because it undermines trust. We no longer can trust someone if we feel like there’s an intent to deceive. So it speaks against that unity, that’s a sub plot in this chapter.

b. Why the speech must be put aside.

Two reasons are given.

1) Because our old self has been laid aside.

2) Because the new self has been put on.

The old self has been laid aside and the new self has been put on. Notice that these are in the past. It has happened. If we believed in Christ, the new self has been put on and the old self has been laid aside.

These words are used in the imagery of putting on clothes and taking off clothes. So we are a new creature in Christ; we have changed. Fundamentally we have changed so there is no reason to continue living as if we have old clothes on, we have new clothes on, we have changed.

So this is why speech must be put aside, because we are a new creature, we have a new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge. This renewal is happening through the Holy Spirit in our life, day by day, according to 2 Corinthians 4:17. Now let’s look at the third thing.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

3. How to connect ourselves in our church (3:11)

“A renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.”

This is an interesting list here in verse 11. This list really has two sections to it. The first talks about the unity:

a. In Christ we are all one.

There are no distinctions; we are all united. As you look at this list, there's an interesting parallelism here: Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised. Well, the uncircumcised goes with Greeks and the circumcised goes with Jew, so we sort of have an inversion here and I think the technical term for this is a chiasm. What this is, is a parallelism where the Greek and the uncircumcised are connected and the Jews and the circumcised are connected and the focus, when this sort of construction is done, is on the middle. So the focus here is, there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

So we can see this, the emphasis of 3:11 is the unity of the Gentile church with the Jews. The Colossians were a Gentile church and they needed to be unified with the Jews.

We can see this most clearly in Ephesians 2:11-22. Ephesians is like a sister letter to Colossians, a lot of the same themes are in both books. Even the same phraseology can appear in both books. We see a long section in Ephesians 2 dealing with the truth that Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ and they have been brought together. This was a problem in the early church. In Acts 15, we see a council that met in Jerusalem to solve this unity problem between the Gentiles and the Jews, to work that out. They not only dealt with the doctrinal issues; they dealt with practical issues of how to work that out. So this addresses this problem of bringing the Jews and the Gentiles together. As we look at this we should see the church shouldn't have distinctions.

The church should not distinguish between Ethnic groups (“Greek”). Greeks should not make those kinds of distinctions. We should see all ethnic groups as equal. Not favoring our ethnic group over or against another ethnic group or religious background.

The church should not distinguish between religious backgrounds (“Jew”). We all come from different religious backgrounds. So we can lay that aside as believers in Christ and not favor one over the other.

The church should not distinguish between past religious practices (“circumcised”). Whatever past religious practices existed, circumcision or anything else.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The church should not distinguish between lack of past religious practices (“uncircumcised”). Whatever our practices have been or our ethnicity is, is not be distinguished in the church.

We should be able to join together in unity because **Christ is all**. That’s what verse 11 says, Christ is all. Because Christ is all, we are one.

b. In Christ, we are all able

Now the second part of this does the same sort of thing “*barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman.*” This part teaches this point and I will try to develop it.

These four things have followed a same pattern, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, because Scythians were largely slaves.

Barbarian was a term that the Greeks used for the European people that were not cultured like they were. It was a derogatory term; it was a mocking of their unintelligible speech, that they were uncultured, uneducated. It was really a term of condensation, a Barbarian. Maybe a term that we can use to communicate that is if some one is called immoral.

Scythians were barbarians but they were the worst type of barbarians. They weren’t just uneducated and uncultured, they were evil, they were murderous, they were riotous, they were destructive people. This is how they ended up being enslaved; to get control of these people. People that came from that type of a background would be looked on by the church as being a threat to the church.

Then, slaves. You know slavery was different in the New Testament era then it was in America a couple of hundred years ago. It wasn’t generally speaking of the type of abusiveness that took place here. It was largely an economic thing. In fact, some people even sold themselves into slavery in order to provide for their needs, in order to make a living. Some slaves had a lot of skill. Even some doctors were slaves, but it lacked a lot.

It depended upon another for economic means. A slave didn’t enjoy the benefits of citizenship as freemen might have. It really wasn’t a place of honor; it was more a place of economic gain if a person was deprived. Freemen is actually a term of someone who has been bought out of slavery and is now free.

So we can look at these things and see that there is an emphasis here. The emphasis in 3:11 is the unity of the Gentile church with the disadvantaged.

The disadvantage could be lack of education (“barbarians”). The church should not distinguish between people that are educated and people that are not educated. There are people that have doctoral degrees and people that haven’t finished grammar school. Whatever their educational status may be should not be a matter of distinction among us.

Or past evil practices (“Scythian”). No matter how bad those past evil practices were, people are forgiven in Christ, we should accept them and not distinguish between them.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Or economic status (“slaves”). Whatever their economic status is. If they are financially independently wealthy, we shouldn’t give them privileged places because of that. If they are very underprivileged, we shouldn’t treat them differently because of their lower economic status. It should have no distinction.

Or social status (“freeman”). There should be no distinction in social status either. Someone who might be well thought of and in a high position in the community or someone who is not very well thought of, somewhat of a social outcast. There should be no distinction socially, either. Whether someone is freed, a slave or whatever.

In this list we can see that the Lord is able to deliver each type of people to Himself, holy. Even barbarians who are uneducated and uncultured. Even Scythians who are evil, wanton, reckless, and did sinful behaviors that hurt people deeply. Even those kind of backgrounds can be overcome in Christ because of this: **Christ is in all!**

All types of people. Christ is able to work in spite of whatever backgrounds people come from or whatever sinful practices people come from. That really is the thrust of this passage, to overcome these sinful practices, seeing yourself dead to these sinful practices, putting them aside, regardless of who you are, regardless of your background, regardless of your advantages or your disadvantage because Christ is all.