

The Old Self

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-11

Introduction

Today, we are continuing our look at Paul's letter to the Colossians, a people for whom he worked hard for the sake of Gospel. Paul wanted the church of the Colossians to be built up in knowledge of Jesus Christ and to be protected from a dangerous teaching that was threatening the church. He reminded them of the Christians' new identity in Christ and who Jesus is and what He had done for them. This statement about their new identity takes center stage in our passage this morning. Paul wrote about their old self and their new self, who they are now as followers of Jesus Christ. Earlier in the letter, Paul wrote that the Colossians, and indeed all followers of Jesus, are alive in Christ. Jesus has made us alive, He has canceled our debt of sin that we could not pay, and He has reconciled us to God through His all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross and His glorious resurrection.

Last week we read how one or more false teachers were telling the church of the Colossians to focus on earthly things, on human traditions. Man made rules that tell us to do certain things in order to be closer to God or to be more spiritual are useless. Setting up human rules to make one righteous will lead to failure. Righteousness must be found in Jesus Christ, not human tradition. Chapter three of the letter marks a shift in Paul's criticism of the false teaching in the church and his appeal for the Colossians to live in such a way that is pleasing to God. What Paul wrote in this passage assumes that the Colossians are true believers, that they have a genuine relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. Paul wrote "if" you are Christians "then" live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. If you have accepted Jesus Christ, then "set your hearts and minds on things above." If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then seek the things that are heavenly, that are of eternal value and will not perish on this earth. Namely, desire Jesus Christ above all things. Do the things that will please Him.

Salvation is God's Work

Before we go too much further, it would probably be helpful to define what salvation is in order to set the context for the passage. Salvation is God's plan and process for restoring His broken creation to fellowship with Him. Long ago, all of creation was very good, but then through man's disobedience and selfishness, God's creation was distorted and our relationship with God was broken. Salvation is God's plan. Scripture defines it as being by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ. It is not based on how good we are, or the good things we may do. It is God's work. While it is God's work, we are involved in it. Perhaps a helpful way to understand salvation is to think of the ABCs of salvation:

- Agree with God that you are a sinner – *Admit*
- Believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – *Believe*
- Turn from your sin and confess your trust in Jesus Christ – *Confess*

Once this happens, once we turn from sin, turn to Jesus, and accept Jesus Christ as Savior, we have joined God's team – God adopts us into His family. God accepts us as His

very own children. Once that happens, we then begin a lifelong process of working with the Holy Spirit to mold us into the likeness of Jesus. That process can move quickly and can move slowly at times. We can choose to be disobedient to God and grieve the Holy Spirit. Doing the wrong things can hinder our spiritual growth in Christ. Even doing the right things for the wrong reasons can hinder our spiritual walk. We read last week how following human traditions, man-made rules and regulations, do not make us spiritual people. It certainly does not make us right before God. Paul criticized these things, but he was also careful to write that all things are not good for us to do. We may choose to not follow human traditions, but that is not a license to do whatever we want. Some things are off limits to the child of God.

Put to Death Your Old Ways

Paul wrote in verse five for us to “put to death what is earthly.” Some translations may say, “Mortify your members” or “Consider your members as dead.” Paul is literally saying, kill what is earthly in you. Certainly, everything in our physical bodies is earthly, and if we took this verse literally, we might think Paul is saying to harm ourselves. Some people have thought this. But, Paul was not saying that we ought to kill our bodies or even hurt our bodies. Paul was not even saying that our physical bodies are evil and need to be punished. As A. W. Tozer once mentioned, Paul was referring to that birthday present you received from Satan. That worldly nature that is a result of our sin, the same nature we inherited from Adam and Eve. It is that human nature that separates us from our holy God and leads us to do all sorts of “worldly things.” Paul listed some of the worldly things we ought to put to death:

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Lust
- Evil desire
- Greed

Most of these items Paul listed have to do with sexual purity, stressing the importance of bringing that area of life under the control and lordship of Christ. “Sexual immorality” refers to every kind of sexual activity outside of marriage. The writer of Hebrews wrote:

Hebrews 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

God designed sex to be within the bounds of marriage and choosing to do differently will cause problems. These sins can intrude into one’s relationship with God, taking His place as the focus of devotion, which is what Paul meant by referring to idolatry. When we choose to do those things that we know God has told us not to do, we are essentially telling God, “We know better than you, and this sin is more important to me than my love, my devotion, and my relationship with you.” We make a god out of something worldly. God’s distinct and holy people ought to be wholly devoted to Him.

Now, you might look at that list of sins and say to yourself, “Well, I don’t have a problem with any of those. I’m not guilty of those sins.” Maybe you are right, but Paul was not finished. Those are not the only things that can be a problem for us. Paul listed a few

other “worldly things” from our “sinful nature,” six more things that Christians need to remove. In verse eight, Paul said to “put away” the following:

- Anger
- Wrath
- Malicious behavior
- Slander
- Obscene talk
- Lying

So, if you could not find a sin in the first list, maybe you can find one or two in the second. We should realize that these lists are not all-inclusive. Certainly there are other things that we do that God has told us not to do. Paul was not identifying only these sins. Maybe these were things Paul had heard were of particular significance to the Colossians. Maybe these were things with which the Colossians struggled. Whatever the reason, these worldly behaviors result in God’s wrath. Paul reminded the Colossians that God would hold everyone accountable. I am not saying that Christians risk losing their salvation if they do these things, but the passage tells us to put to death these things, so stop doing them.

I remember a movie from the late 1970s about a defense lawyer who was disgusted with corruption in the legal system. This lawyer was asked to defend a judge he despised and if he refused, he would be disbarred. Frustrated with the injustice of the legal system, the lawyer at the end of the movie said, “That man...if he’s allowed to go free, then something really wrong is goin’ on here!” The judge of that case said, “You are out of order!” The lawyer responded, “You’re out of order! You’re out of order! The whole trial is out of order! They’re out of order!” Lawyers who try to do right and defend those who are innocent can become discouraged by the injustice, not to mention the victims of the system. But that is not really why I mentioned this movie. In one scene, another client of the same lawyer who had been a regular client of his (a repeat offender), called the defense lawyer from the scene of an accident. The client told him, “You have to help me. What am I going to do?” The lawyer, frustrated with his client for having to fix his problems time after time, said, “Stop breaking the law!” Stop doing these things that put you in trouble and cause problems in your life.

Well, that is the sense of what Paul was saying in this passage. He was telling the Colossians, stop doing these things that are not Christ-like. Cease doing those things that God does not approve and that hurts you and the Church. Sometimes we may think that God’s commandments are burdensome or that they do not make sense. Like children, we may think that our heavenly Father is just being mean or does not want us to have fun. God tells us to do certain things and not to do certain things because He is God and has the right to set the rules for His creation. But another way to look at this is that God, like a good Father, knows what is best for His children. He told us these things for our own good. And again, obeying these rules does not save us. Being obedient is a response to God’s favor on us, and not a means of gaining His favor. We do not do good in order to be saved. We do good things because we are saved and in a new relationship with God. We want to please our Father in heaven and be more like His Son. If you are in Christ, you are dead to sin, therefore, put to death sinful things.

The Colossians once did these things. They were living in them. They practiced these things. But, they repented and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That is not who they are now. Paul wrote that they have “put off this old self.” This suggests an event that has already taken place. They have already been adopted into God’s family and have already become His children. They have changed teams. They are working for a new boss. They have a new identity. They are now known by their relationship with Jesus Christ. Those worldly things no longer define who they are. What remains is for them to bring their behavior into line with their new identity. Paul was saying put away your former ways. This is where sanctification occurs. They are being renewed into the image of Jesus Christ. This indicates that the transformation of Christians is an ongoing process, and we can work with or against the Holy Spirit. We can choose to be obedient or disobedient to God.

Make Christ is Everything to Everyone

The last point I would like to mention is that salvation is not exclusive to one type of people group. God’s plan of salvation is available to all types of people. The Gospel is available to all nations and groups of people. Paul wrote in the last verse of our passage:

Colossians 3:11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but *Christ is all, and in all.*

Christ is all and in all. Jesus Christ is everything to everyone. When it comes to having access to God, to accepting Jesus Christ, to becoming a part of God’s church, God draws all types of people to Himself. Salvation is not available to only the Jews. No one has a special claim on God or is treated with less dignity than any other. Salvation is available to Jews, Gentiles, barbarians, slave and free. Let me put it this way – Salvation is available to black, white, Indian, Asian, European, Hindu, Arab, African, Republican, Democrat, poor, middle class, and rich...to every people group.

This underscores the need for God’s people to go and reach the lost for Jesus Christ, no matter who they are, where they are, or what they have done. Jesus Christ has called all of us to go and make disciples, not to just those we want to bring in, not to just those we are comfortable being around, and not to just those who we think would be a good fit for the church, but to all nations. Jesus’ command to the church, not to the pastor, or to the deacons, but to the church, is to go, make disciples of everyone. Christ is all and in all.

Conclusion

There is an old self that needs to die and we have to be vigilant to put off those old ways. We must pursue Jesus Christ in every aspect of our lives. Christ must be all and in all. What does the world know about us? When our community sees the local church, what do they see? Do they see followers of Jesus Christ where “Christ is all and in all?” Or, do they see lukewarm Christians who are holding on their former ways and really have no distinction from the rest of the world? I am not saying that Christians are perfect and sinless. The Lord knows that I sin quiet frequently and I am in need of constant forgiveness. But what I am saying is this, is there are distinct difference between the person you once were and the person you now are after accepting Christ? Is there evidence of the Holy Spirit working in your life to make you more like Jesus?

We have to constantly “put to death” those old ways, those things that we did that are not Christ-like, and constantly renew our love for Jesus Christ. We can do this through prayer, through reading God’s Word, through fellowship with other believers. The challenge for us is to make Jesus Christ the center of our lives. Desire Jesus Christ above all things. Make God your most treasured possession, the most important Person in your life from which all other people and things do not even compare. Acknowledge your dependence on God. Put your old ways behind you, and make Christ the center of all aspects of your life.

Perhaps there is no evidence of change in your life. Maybe you have never turn from your old self and turned to Jesus Christ for salvation. Maybe you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Today can be the day that you become a new person. Today can be the day that you know the joy, hope and peace of a right relationship with God. The bad news is that we are all lost without a Savior. The good news, however, is that we have a Savior and whosoever believes in Jesus Christ, will be saved and have eternal life. Have you believed in Him? Will you today? Amen!