

## The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center

### New Man or Old Man?

Colossians 3:8-11

Mark Vroegop

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8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 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 renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all (Col 3:8-11).

About a year ago, I decided that we needed to finish a bonus room that was over our garage. The next step in the project was to hang drywall, and I thought that I would save some money and do it myself. The first step in the project was going to Lowe's, buying thirty sheets of drywall, and loading them into our trailer.

Sarah and I decided that we would take all the kids with us so they could "help" me with the job. Well things were going great. We found the dry wall, loaded it onto a cart, paid for it, and then we tried to transfer it to the trailer. You've probably heard that if you can wallpaper together that you'll have a great marriage? Well in our home the challenges of hanging wallpaper are nothing compared to moving heavy objects together. Nothing activates my flesh faster than the challenge of moving heavy objects with my wife.

Well I was starting to exercise my flesh pretty significantly as we tried to move these heavy sheet of drywall into our trailer. Finally, I was getting so frustrated that I sent everyone to the car, and I determined (rather sinfully) that I was going to do it myself.

Apparently my struggle with the drywall was pretty obvious because a man pulled up in a truck next to my car, hopped out, and said, "Do you need some help?" Now that was a very kind thing to say because he probably could have said, "Here, let me help you." He grabbed the other side of the drywall, and in a matter of five minutes the job was done. I was so grateful.

When I got back in the car there was a moment or two of awkward silence. Then one of our twins said, "Dad, do you think that guy was a Christian?" And I said, "I don't know son, but he sure acted like one, didn't he?"

What would prompt my son to say that? He said that because the man's graciousness and concern for me was rare and radical. He didn't have to stop. He didn't have to help. He didn't

have to give of himself. But he did. His actions were so unselfish that it begged the question – do you think he’s a Christian?

Implicit in my son’s question is a very important idea. Namely, that being a follower of Jesus results in a remarkably different life. Or that is the way that it is supposed to be or should be. The power of gospel (trusting Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins) is the way in which it changes hearts. Jesus makes us new men and women, he fills us with the Spirit, and the divinely-designed result is a life whose orientation and actions are different than our self-centered, me-absorbed culture. The new man, with Christ at the center, lives a remarkably different life, and Colossians 3:8-11 helps us understand what this new man looks like and does.

The flow of Paul’s thought in Colossians has moved from the indicative (descriptions of who we are in Christ) to the imperative (commands to live out our position). Our text this morning is the second of three imperatives (v 5 – put to death, v 8 – put off, v 12 – put on).

So what are the characteristics of the new man?

### **1. Putting away sins that hurt people (v 8)**

It is remarkable here that one of the chief characteristics of a person who has Jesus at the center of their life is not living for themselves. Jesus rules their life, and this makes a person radically different.

Verse 8 builds on what we learned in verses 5-7 about putting sin to death. I don’t know about you but the idea of intentional atrophy was a very helpful concept to me. It brought some helpful clarity as to what mortification of sin is really all about. If you missed last week, I’d encourage you to get the notes on our website or download the sermon because I think we stumbled onto something that is really helpful. The point that I made was that we need to practice intentional atrophy when it comes to the flesh. We need to stop exercising the flesh, particularly in sexual areas, at every level.

Verse 8 takes the next step and expands the target of intentional atrophy of the flesh in some areas of sin that we might call respectable sins, the kind of sins that we tend to tolerate in our lives even though we know they are wrong. That is why Paul says, “but now you must put them all away...” So he expands the application to more than just sexual sins. In fact the list seems to be specifically targeting sins that hurt people: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying.

Let’s look at the list:

**Anger** – this word (orge) comes from a root word that means to reach after or long for something. It is to want something with a strong desire or passion. In a positive sense, this word was used to describe God's judgment (Rom 12:19), and believers could have anger while not sinning (Eph 4:26). In a negative sense, fathers are not to provoke this in their kids (Eph 6:4), and we must be slow to anger knowing that it doesn't accomplish the righteousness of God (Jam 1:19-20). The word suggests a settled or abiding condition of the mind with a view toward revenge or punishment. So it seems that this word means a kind of settled, angry heart that seeks to punish, get even, and take the place of God.

Orge is quick to speak, slow to listen, and seeks to take revenge, and it really is all about wanting control. We get angry because we want to mini-gods.

**Wrath** – this is the word thumos, and it differs from anger in that it appears to be more emotional and explosive. It denotes violent movement and means to boil up, or to smoke. Thumos is the fury of anger (Rev 16:19).

While these two words are used often together you could think of the differences between them like this: anger is the boiling water in the tea pot; wrath is when the pot starts to whistle.

**Malice** – the word comes from the word meaning evil. It is often translated as trouble (Matt 6:34 – "tomorrow has enough trouble of its own) and wickedness (Acts 8:22 – "repent of this wickedness"). It basically refers to the kind of actions toward others that cause a disruption of fellowship or relational tension; it is the deliberate intent to harm someone.<sup>1</sup>

**Slander** – here we have the Greek word blasphemia. It is speech that intends to harm. Malice was more of the motive; slander is the action. Disparage, defame, revile, and gossip are other words that could also be used here. Titus 3:2 gives this command regarding slander: "speak evil of no one."

**Obscene talk** – the word means either filthy communication or abusive speech. In other words, Paul is condemning speech that creates moral or relational defilement.

**Lying** – you probably don't need a definition here except to say that this is deceptive speech, conversation that doesn't capture the entire truth.

Do you know what the problem is with this list? Nothing I shared with you here is new information. The fact is we know that these things are wrong, but they are respectable sins for Christians. But who among us couldn't think of a time when someone's anger, wrath, or slander wounded us deeply. Who among us hasn't committed these sins? Sins of the tongue grieve the heart of God, and they destroy the beautiful harmony of the body of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter O'Brien. Word Biblical Commentary – Colossians, Philemon. Waco, Texas: Word Publishing, 1982. p. 187.

What are we to do with these sins? **We are to put them off.** The verb “put off” is the same tense as “put to death” which meant to have a settled attitude in light of what has happened in the past. Paul is saying the same thing as before (intentional atrophy – don’t exercise the flesh), but in a slightly different way. Putting something off was used of old, worn out clothes; clothes that were useless and didn’t fit any more.

So there is a mindset here about the old clothing of these sins: they don’t fit. Therefore, in all our options of what we could say or do, there are certain things that we choose to not put on because they just don’t fit anymore. These sins remind us about who we used to be. They don’t fit with the new man, and therefore Paul calls us to put them off.

When I was in High School, getting a Varsity jacket was a big deal. It represented achievement, status, and (frankly) being cool. But I don’t wear it anymore. Do you know why? Two reasons: first, it is all about the past, and second, it doesn’t fit anymore. To wear it would be silly and unattractive.

Listen! Anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying are all the unattractive garments of what you used to be. So when you are tempted to put those old garments on – take a good look in the mirror of God’s word. They don’t fit. Take them off and put them away. The new man puts away sins that hurt people.

## **2. Growing progressively into the image of Christ**

The second characteristic of the new man is a progressive growth into the image of Christ. Refusing to put on the respectable sins like anger, wrath, malice, slander, etc is on part, but the over-arching goal is an ever growing understanding as to what it means to be like Christ.

The new self is different than this in three ways:

1. **The heart has been permanently changed.** The text says that you have “put off the old self with his practices and put on the new self.” This happens the moment that someone receives Christ as his or her savior. God, through Christ, creates a new person with new desires, new passions, and new actions. There is a spiritual rebirth that takes place (John 3:3). Jesus changes the orientation of your heart.
2. **Growth happens in incremental steps.** The new self is described here (v 10) as “being renewed,” and the tense of the word (present, passive) suggests something that is continually happening to me. So while there was a definitive change of my motivation, desire, and heart the expression or application of that happens progressively over time. Justification was instantaneous; sanctification is progressive.

- 3. The goal is to be like Jesus.** The final difference relates to what we are being renewed into, and the text says “in knowledge after the image of its creator.” So the ultimate product is the knowledge of what it is to be Christ-like. The goal is not just change, however necessary the change may be. The ultimate objective is the formation of the qualities of Christ in you, and that is why other passages similar to Colossians 3:10 simply say “[you] have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).

So the motive for putting these sins off is different for the person who has received Christ as his or her savior. A non-Christian might choose to work on the sins that we previously mentioned because they create difficulties in relationships, hurt people, or make life complicated. A non-Christian might even have some success in controlling his or her anger, tongue, or pattern of lying. But there is vast difference between a Christian and a non-Christian regarding why they are focusing on this. The Christian is motivated by a relentless passion to be like Jesus. A non-Christian is motivated by the fact that it works – it does some good.

Now this distinction is important to make because there are far too many Christians who approach their spiritual growth process like non-Christians. They sound like they want to grow but the question is: into what? They come to church, listen to a message, talk with a counselor, read the Bible, and pray; they want change – in their marriage, in their kids, in their desires. They are desperate. However, their goal may not be compatible with the goal of the Bible. You see the goal of the Bible is create Christlikeness in you which will result in radical changes in all areas of your life. And you can change for a time, but if Christlikeness is not the motive and the goal then the change will never last, your desire will fade, and when you get what you want you’ll ditch the biblical influences in your life.

You see the problem with formerly mentioned sins like anger, wrath, slander, etc. is that they can really work for a season; in fact this is why they are so tempting. You can get what you want pretty quickly by using these sinful tactics – anger will make your kids will do what you want, slandering others will make you look better, lying allows you to skirt around the truth. These sins work, and that is the problem with them.

So winning the battle with anger, wrath, slander, etc. is only won by a greater longing to be like Jesus, a longing that progressively grows stronger and stronger over time. The new self (man) is characterized by an incremental growth in Christlikeness.

### **3. Identifying with others through Christ**

Here is one of the most beautiful characteristics of the new self and what the body of Christ was meant to be: our identity and unity is found in Jesus. The new self is called to no longer categorize ourselves based upon our race, socio-economic status, or culture; the Bible calls us to new, singular identity in Christ.

Paul says, “here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free...” That statement was radical beyond measure. These divisions defined the world in Paul’s day. Jews and Greeks did not worship in the same place, eat the same food, or enter each other’s houses. Circumcision was THE defining mark of religious heritage. The Greeks called anyone who didn’t speak Greek barbarians, and they saw them as culturally inferior. Scythian was an even lower culture of people that were often made fun of because of their uncouth ways and speech.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between slave and free meant the difference between being viewed a piece of property or having real rights.

These barriers were a real part of their culture just like they are today. Certainly our nation has made progress in this area, but it shocks me when I think that it was only one generation ago that there were separate seats on buses, separate schools, and separate restaurants. So while we’ve made progress, the reality of racism and sins of pride and exclusivity are still among us. And no one has more reason to fight against this than people who follow Jesus. Why? Because Paul says, “Christ is all and in all.”

What does that mean? It means that Christ who lives each of his people binds them together in one, restoring the original image of creation.<sup>3</sup> It means that there is something beautiful and right when our divided world sees the body of Christ and local churches love each other even though we are not all the same.

It is not that we are all the same – look the same, talk the same, act the same. No, that’s a cult! However, it does mean that there is something far greater than how different we are – it is Christ. He unites us into a beautiful body that the world looks at and says, “Look how much they love each other!” No one is going to say that about a church filled with people who are all the same, but they will take notice of a body of believers whose unity in diversity proclaims the beauty of the gospel.

Imagine with me two scenes with the same response yet different meanings: Scene one is the image of the doors of the church opening after this service and as people file out everyone looks the same – walk the same, dress the same, talk the same, etc. Someone looking at that scene is going to say, “What is going on in there? That’s scary.” But imagine another scene with me of the doors opening and as people file out there is a radical diversity – many skin colors, various walks of life, radically different backgrounds. Someone looking at that scene would say, “What is going on in there? That’s beautiful.” Jesus creates a loving unity among his people that is shocking to the world.

Shocking the world. That’s what the church used to do. A radical passion to follow Jesus was the way that the world saw that Christianity really worked. And I want to call each of us to see that God’s designed was to shock the world by taking sinful people and making them new.

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> F.F. Bruce. The Epistle to the Colossians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984. p. 151.

God calls us to be new men and women today. He redeemed us so that we could show the world that anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying are not the way we operate. He redeemed us so that we could progressively grow more and more into the image of Christ. Such that people would understand that Christianity really works. And he redeemed us so that in the midst of a culture filled with social divisions and racial animosity we could show the world love like they've never seen.

You see this is what it means to live with Jesus at the center. He causes us to live radically different lives.

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