

## Introduction:

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...” (**Colossians 1:21-22**, ESV). Why did Jesus reconcile us by His death? In order to present us holy, blameless, above reproach. Think about what this is saying. God pursued our holiness so much, He put His Son to death. Jesus pursued our holiness so much, He put his body of flesh to death. Again, He did this so we could be holy. I can’t help but think about Israel, whom many of us have been studying lately. We know that in the 10 plagues, the exodus, and the crossing of the Red Sea, God delivered Israel not so they could worship other gods and serve lawlessness, but so they could worship Him, serve Him, and be holy as He is holy (cf. **Leviticus 11:44**). In like manner, Jesus did not sacrifice Himself, so we could linger in sin and pursue lawlessness, but so we could be holy as He is holy (cf. **I Peter 1:16**). Therefore, it should not surprise us that when Paul comes back to this point about reconciliation leading us from hostility to holiness in **Colossians 3:5**, he begins by saying, “Put to death what is earthly in you.” That sounds harsh to us. It sounds almost as harsh as what God asked of Israel when He brought them into the Promised Land and demanded they devote the earthly inhabitants of that land to destruction (cf. **Deuteronomy 7:1-2**). He is asking us to do this for the very same reasons He asked them. Please note three very important lessons from this statement in **Colossians 3:5** and its surrounding context.

## Discussion:

### I. Sin is just that serious.

- A. We live in a sin saturated society. Sin is openly honored around us. We can watch it on television and in the movies. We can hear about it in songs on the radio. We can read about it in books, magazines, and tabloids. We are even entertained by it on the news. We often say some folks aren’t bothered by sin. I’m not sure that is true. Instead, I think just about everyone is bothered by sin. Sin introduces disharmony into our lives. Now we have to deal with the disharmony. The problem is not that folks aren’t bothered by it. The problem is what they do when they are bothered by it. What our society has done with it is soften it. Sure, we all know we shouldn’t sin, but sin is really not all that bad. Individual sins are no longer sins. They are mistakes, flaws, slip ups, faux pas. Don’t make a big deal about it; after all we’re only human and everyone does it. Slavery to sin (cf. **Romans 6:16**) becomes no more than a sickness, an obsession, an addiction. Let’s face it. Our culture deals with the disharmony of sin by making it no big deal.
- B. Some who claim to be Christians do the same thing, but they baptize this mindset by invoking God’s grace over it. Certainly, none would actually say the words, “Sin is no big deal because of God’s grace.” However, they continue sinning indiscriminately and demonstrate by their actions that they believe grace means sin is no big deal. Folks have been doing this since the gospel of grace was established. Paul had to address it in **Galatians 5:13** and Jude in **Jude 4**.
- C. Paul’s words in **Colossians 3:5**, however, demonstrate our culture and these people are wrong. Sin is a very, very big deal. Why? **Colossians 3:6** explains. “On account of these the wrath of God is coming” (ESV). This is not because God is arbitrarily upset by some actions He just doesn’t like so He decides to punish us for eternity. This is because God is holy and by His very nature cannot endure indefinitely side by side with sin. As **Psalms 5:4-6** demonstrates, God’s holiness means sin, evil, and wickedness cannot dwell with Him. He must destroy it. He must drive it away from His presence.
- D. Again, this reminds me of Israel as they entered the Promised Land. In **Deuteronomy 7:3-4**, God explains to Israel why they must put to death the earthly inhabitants of Canaan. If they didn’t, the earthly influence of the Canaanites would remain among Israel. Israel would eventually succumb to their temptation and turn to other gods. Then the wrath of God would be kindled and He would destroy Israel from the land. Israel discovered it was a very big deal. It was either the Canaanites or the Israelites. They either put the earthly inhabitants of the land to death, or they were going to die.
- E. Sin is just that big of a deal. **Romans 6:23** explains that the wages of sin is death. We need to understand that it is either sin or us. Either we put to death what is earthly in us, devoting it to destruction or we will be devoted to destruction.

## II. Extreme measures must be taken.

- A. Since sin is just this serious, we need to take it seriously. Paul doesn't ask us to minimize what is earthly within us. He doesn't ask us to be on guard against what is earthly in us. He doesn't ask us to hinder what is earthly in us. He commands us to execute what is earthly in us.
- B. Paul uses a wordplay here that we miss in many modern English translations including the ESV. The ASV and the NKJV get us closer to the literal statement when they translate this verse: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth" (NKJV). Even this doesn't make it completely clear for us because we wonder what a "member" is in this context. BDAG defines this word as "a part of the human body, *member, part, limb.*" Taken literally, Paul is telling us we must put to death our limbs and body parts that are on the earth.
- C. Whoa! That should stop us in our tracks. If a part or limb of my body sins, I'm supposed to kill it? Certainly, Paul is using figures of speech very similar to Jesus recorded in **Matthew 5:29-30**. We are not intended to take this literally. We are not supposed to literally cut off the body part involved in sin. After all, when we read **Colossians 3:2** and realize the root of all this is our minds, we see that the real body part that must be removed is the brain (or as the ancients saw it, the heart).
- D. Why then does Paul make this connection? Consider **Romans 7:5**. "For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" (ESV). See the link between the sinful passions and the members of our bodies in this passage. Have you ever heard the old saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword"? The man who penned this statement wasn't actually talking about pens and swords. He was talking about the writing and fighting that pens and swords are used for. In like manner, in **Colossians 3:5**, Paul is not actually talking about the limbs and parts of our body, but about the sinful passions that use the limbs and parts of our bodies to sin and the sins they produce. This becomes even more clear as Paul goes on to define what we really need to put to death by saying in **vs. 5**, "sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (ESV), and then in **vs. 8**, "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth" (ESV). These should be taken as representative lists, not exhaustive ones.
- E. The reason Paul used this figurative statement is not so we can say, "Oh good, Paul didn't mean what he literally said." The reason he used it is to stop us in our tracks and cause us to realize exactly how serious what we are dealing with us. It also highlights how painful it will be. Having become used to these sins when we walked in the flesh, destroying the desires and passions that lead to them is going to feel spiritually like cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye. It takes spiritual surgery and amputation. It won't be easy. It is serious and it is extreme, but it is necessary. Remember, it is either them or us.
- F. Again, I can't help but think of those Israelites going into the Promised Land. When the first generation of Israelites came to the Promised Land in **Numbers 14**, they saw the fortified cities, the armies, the giants. This was going to be painful. It was going to be hard. Some of the Israelites might die in the process. Not to mention the difficulty of carrying out the orders to execute man, woman, and child. These were extreme measures, but sin and holiness were just that serious.
- G. This demands some serious self-examination. What sinful passions are making use of your members? What sinful passions are making use of your eyes, mouth, ears, hands, feet, brain, body? Don't just try to weaken those passions, kill them. Don't just try to hinder their influence on your members, execute them.
- H. Why are we to take these extreme actions?
  1. Because, as **Colossians 2:20-3:4** explains, we died with Christ and have been raised with Him so that our life is hidden in Him. Our living is to be in Him; it is no longer to be in the sins in which we lived before Christ (**Colossians 3:7**).
  2. Because as **Colossians 2:11-14** explains, when we were baptized, we were buried with Christ and then made alive in Him by faith in the power of God's working. In that we were spiritually circumcised, which does not mean baptism is the circumcision of the New Covenant. Rather, it uses that imagery to say that our body of flesh was put off. That means we need to put off the fleshly passions and behaviors that characterized us when we walked in the flesh.
  3. Because as **Colossians 1:21-22** explains and as we said earlier, Jesus put His body of flesh to death so we could become holy, blameless, and beyond reproach.
  4. In other words, Jesus put His body of flesh to death for our holiness, He has cut off our body of the flesh for our holiness, now we need to live like it by putting what is earthly in us to death.

## III. God will give the victory.

- A. Now we get to the reason I've been tying this back to Israel. If you're like me, part of you is saying, "No way. I'll never make it. That is just too hard. I've failed at that too many times. I can't do it. I might as well give up."

- B. Think again of Israel. Isn't that exactly what the first generation in **Numbers 14** said? "No way. We'll never make it. That is just too hard. We can't do it. We might as well give up." What happened? They didn't do it. They didn't take the land. Rather, they wandered in the wilderness until that faithless generation died out (**Numbers 14:28-33**).
- C. Then came the second generation. What did they say? Did they say, "Yes way. We'll make it. This is easy. We can do this."? Actually, that is not what they said. And this is important because, sadly, this is the bad advice we often give each other and ourselves. "Keep fighting. You can do it. Try harder. Believe in yourself." No. They said, "Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands" (**Joshua 2:24**, ESV).
- D. Paul is not telling us to put to death what is earthly in us because He thinks we are strong enough to do so. He is telling us that because He knows our God is strong enough to give us this victory if we will take up arms and fight. Think of all that God has done for us already in this battle.
1. In **Colossians 3:16**, God has given us His Word to guide us in the battle. Not only that, He has given us each other to encourage and instruct.
  2. In **Colossians 2:12; 3:1**, God raised us up and made us alive in Christ.
  3. In **Colossians 4:2**, God has given us prayer by which we can call on Him and seek His aid.
  4. In **Colossians 3:23-2:5**, God gave us apostles like Paul who ministered and served, establishing a great example for us.
  5. In **Colossians 4:12-13**, God has given workers in the kingdom, like Epaphras was for the Colossians, who work hard for us and struggle in prayer for us. We have men like this in our shepherds, Bob Andrews, Tim Fannin, Tom Garland, Buddy Payne, Kelly Reese, and Joe Rose. And they have men like this in each other and in others among us.
  6. In **Colossians 2:14**, God has given us forgiveness by cancelling the record of debt, that is the Law, that stood against us with its demands.
  7. In **Colossians 2:15**, God stripped and disarmed the rulers and authorities who fight against us, putting them to open shame.
  8. In **Colossians 1:11**, God strengthens us with power, according to His glorious might.
  9. In **Colossians 1:13**, God has delivered us from the domain, the power, the control of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.
  10. Which leads us to **Colossians 1:15-22**. God has given us His Son on the cross to reconcile us and lead us to holiness, blamelessness, and irreproachability. And may I add to this what Paul said in **Romans 8:32**. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (ESV).
- E. Brothers and sisters, the battle belongs to the Lord. I know it is hard. I know it seems impossible. But nothing is impossible with the Lord. I am not asking you to take up arms against your sinful passions because you are strong enough to deal with them. I'm asking you to do so because God is and He will win these battles for you if you will simply fight with your faith in the power of His working. And when you stumble and fall, do not let your faith be shaken for even a moment as Joshua did in **Joshua 7:6-9**. Find the sin in your personal camp and excise it through confession and repentance, taking up arms against it to put it to death. And then march resolutely on in battle as Israel did next, defeating Ai in **Joshua 8**.
- F. Praise the Lord! This is His battle. We are weak, but He is strong. Let's take up arms and fight.

#### Conclusion:

Look again at **Colossians 1:21-22**. Jesus put His body of flesh to death in order to present you holy, blameless, and beyond reproach. That is how serious He thought sin was. That is how badly He wanted your holiness. Do you want holiness bad enough to put your body of flesh to death? If so, let me ask this. Have you been baptized in water for the remission of your sins? Because that is exactly when Christ circumcises or cuts off your body of flesh, putting it to death. That is where your fight against sin and sinful passions begins (**Colossians 2:11-12**). This doesn't happen because your work in baptism is so powerful. No, this happens because of your faith in the powerful working of God through baptism. The battle belongs to the Lord. Are you ready to take up arms and fight in His army against your sin letting Him lead you to victory? If so, why not join the fray right now.