

“Put Off”
Colossians
Colossians 3:1-11
05/14/2023

Introduction

Pray.

Snake Story. One of the things Lindsay and I really enjoy about life in Charlotte is the neighborhood we live in. It’s a huge blessing from God. We live in this great neighborhood, tons of huge old oak trees, in this house that backs up to some woods. It’s fantastic! Except...for two things.

The first is how much you have to rake in the fall. I mean it’s like you rake and then rake some more, and then you look back at the spot you just raked and there’s a whole new layer of leaves. It’s awful.

The second not so great thing is some of the wildlife, particularly snakes. I hate snakes.

A few weeks ago Lindsay was pulling into our driveway with our 3 year old and 1 year old in the backseat and there was a 4 foot snake right in the middle of the driveway. And let me just tell you – **I never knew a Honda Odyssey could be such a snake-killing machine.** She ran it over. Backed up over it. Ran it over again. And then just for good measure she backed up just run it over a 3rd time. Mama bear just came out and that snake didn’t stand a chance.

Now, why do I tell you that story, besides just to make sure you know not to mess with Lindsay?

Well I wanted to start with that because I actually think it’s a really good picture of what we’re going to see today from the Scriptures of how we should treat what the Bible would call sin.

Let me explain.

Over these next two weeks, as we’re in between two longer sermon series, I want to spend our time together in **Colossians 3.**

And at the core of this chapter is what the Bible would call **sanctification – The work of God, over the course of our lives, where He shapes us, through our active participation, to look more like Jesus.**

And one of the things we’ll see in Colossians 3 is that our participation in that sanctification involves two specific actions.

One of those actions, as we’ll explore next week, is the things we start doing. Or in the language of the passage, what we **“put on”**. That we would learn, over time, through intentional practices, how to more and more be people of love, peace, forgiveness, grace, thanksgiving, gratitude. Beautiful stuff. What people should be able to see when they look at how we live.

But the first part of being sanctified, becoming more like Jesus, is what we’ll **stop doing**. What will no longer mark our lives because we are followers of Jesus. There are things we must **“put off”** and **“put to death”** according to Colossians 3 – stop living into. There are certain things, once you become a follower of Jesus, that are to be a decreasing part of your life.

And that's what I want to talk about today. So here's where we're headed. Very simple outline that we'll follow both this week and next – what, how, and why.

This week:

1. **What** do we put to death?
2. **How** do we put it to death?
3. **Why** do we put it to death?

What do we put to death?

Let's start in v5, we'll come back to verses 1-4.

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...

Now, if you track through the NT one of the contrasts you'll start to see is between what the Bible calls "heavenly" and what the Bible calls "earthly". Now what this is not talking about is physical things. So it's not that heavenly is like clouds and angels and streets paved with gold and earthly is like food, plants and animals.

What the Bible does when it contrasts those two terms - heaven and earth - is setting up **what is of God and what is not of God.**

So when Paul, the author of Colossians, says put to death therefore what is **earthly** in you, he doesn't mean your job, or your hobbies, he means what still resides within your heart and life that is not of God. What we would more commonly call **sin**.

Sin – how we think, love, and live that is contrary to God's design.

To help us out Paul is going to get specific. He's going to give us two lists, they're not exhaustive, but they show a pretty wide range of what is "earthly" in us, what is not of God, that we are called to put to death.

VERSE 5:

- **Sexual Immorality** – Any sexual activity you give your body or mind to that is not in God's design for sex between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage. This is lust in your heart, fantasy, pornography, sexual desire for someone you're not married to.
- **Impurity** – He goes further than just sexual impurity – this is any moral corruption. You're shady with reporting your hours at work, deceitful in a friendship, lie a little bit on your taxes, embellish the details of a story to get a laugh – that's impurity.
- **Passion + Evil Desire** – He's talking about impulses or compulsions that are out of step with God's desire for your life. Those evil impulses where you just can't help yourself but do what you know is wrong.
- **Covetousness + Idolatry** – Covetousness – unhealthy desire of what someone else has. Idolatry – worshipping something or someone other than God. SO put together – this is believing at your core God is withholding from you something that you deserve and see someone else has.

VERSE 8: "But now you must put them all away..."

- **Anger + Wrath** – our lashing out at one another, holding grudges, holding in our hearts bitterness and frustration against one another.
- **Malice + Slander** – doing harm to one another. We won't necessarily go up and punch someone in the face when we hate them, we'll just spread some untrue things about them instead. We'll just slander them to our friends, run their name through the mud.

- **Obscene Talk** – And if that doesn't work, instead of slandering them behind their back, we'll just say it to their face. We'll bring great harm and great destruction to someone through our words.

All of these things are types of "earthliness" within us that we are to put to death. The first step in sanctification – which I hope is your desire if you love Jesus, to want to live more like Him – is to put these things in our lives to death.

We learn, more and more, to say no to the ways we think, love, and live contrary to the design and will of God. No to anger, no to slander, no to sexual immorality, no to malice and obscene talk, no to idolatry.

We put them to death. We drive over them. Back up. And drive over them again. What do we put to death? Sin.

But, easier said than done, right? Which leads to point 2...how?

How do we put sin to death?

How? Well I think the passage gives us three really good starting steps.

1. Agree with God that sin is sin and sin is serious.

Sin is a big deal to God. It is no light and trivial thing when God's creation, you and me, do not live within God's design.

The Bible is very clear about that right here in Colossians 3. Paul lists all of these various sins, tells us to put them to death, and then warns us with these words in v6...

6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

Now you might notice this is not on many people's short list of favorite bible verses, right? I like John 3:16 "for God so loved the world", I like Phil 4:13 - "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" and uh oh yeah Col 3:6 - "On account of sin the wrath of God is coming."

And that may be because of one of the biggest and silliest lies that has ever happened in American Christianity, and it sounds something like this - "God is a God of love. Therefore, he could never be angry with anyone. If God is a God of love, there is no room for him to have any wrath."

But here's what's important to understand – the greater the love, the greater the capacity for wrath.

Baseball bat. Let me explain – If you came over to my house with a baseball bat, and started hitting my fence, I'd be kind of weirded out and a little afraid but ok no big deal. If you started hitting my cars, I'd be a little bit more angry. If you started swinging at my kids or my wife – we're throwing down.

Love drives wrath. I love my wife and kids so much, and that actually means I have a greater propensity towards wrath for those who would try to harm them.

And there are two things the Bible is very clear God loves – **His glory and His people. And sin seeks to destroy both.**

Sin seeks to destroy God's glory – Because we see Him. We see how great He is, how awesome He is. How He offers Himself freely to us as the bread of life, as the living water that will never run dry. That He in His glory and goodness is the great satisfier of our souls. And when we choose sin, we are looking at Him, and going "not good enough, I need this too. Or I need this instead. You're not glorious enough God! You're not enough for me! I need x, y, and z to truly be happy."

Sin also seeks to destroy God's people – God loves His people. And sin destroys his people. God is not telling us through Paul in Colossians 3 to kill sin because He is some cosmic killjoy. Become a Christian, no more sex for you! Haha no more fun allowed!

That's not it. God, as the author of all that is true, beautiful, and good, is after our deeper joy, our true flourishing. This is something we push a ton at Citizens – God's design for life is not simply right, it's also good. And sin, even if it seems delightful in the moment, leads to greater death and destruction.

That's what this list is – it looks compelling, it looks intriguing – it's end is all destruction.

- Sexual immorality, though it might bring a temporary moment of pleasure, it ultimately destroys the image of God, turns people into objects to be used for our own gratification and pleasure.
- Anger, Bitterness, Slander – though it feels good in the moment to get a laugh or to get revenge, they actually crush the very thing we were designed for and our soul craves – deep community with others.

God says – I know it looks harmless - but it's a snake! Snakes are not friends. You don't get out and play fetch or something with it, idk. It's a snake. It's bad. Anything less than killing it would be dangerous to us.

In the famous words of Puritan John Owen – **"Be killing sin, or it will be killing you."**

So here's why all of this matters – Because if we're going to put sin to death, we have to learn to agree with God and call sin sin and take sin seriously.

Because here's how it works out in our lives, these things Paul says bring the wrath of God, we shrug our shoulders as no big deal.

- Sexual immorality? No big deal. Why does God care who I sleep with? It's not hurting anyone. We're committed to each other. The Bible was written thousands of years ago, it was different then.
- Passion and evil desire? Being ruled by your emotions and impulses? No big deal. It's just my enneagram, I'm a 4. I'm just emotional and emotions are good right, I can't help it that I lash out at people. I can't help it that I said that rude thing to you. It's just kind of who I am, I'm emotional.
- Anger? No big deal. Life is stressful. You really hurt me. And doesn't the Bible say that thing somewhere or in some place about righteous anger? Maybe it was that, right?

And what's happening underneath the surface is that we're convincing ourselves it's ok, because we don't feel "conviction" over it, when in reality that lack of conviction is our own seared conscience. Our sin has numbed us to the things of God and from the Holy Spirit speaking into our lives.

And so the first step in learning to put sin to death is just to agree before God and before others in confession and repentance – this is sin and it's killing me, it's harming me, and it's not ok in my life.

2. Consistent mundane spiritual practices over the long haul

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...

The old self had its practices. It had its rhythms and routines and ways of being in the world. But that gets put off, and the new self with new practices gets put on.

So you see, part of how you learn to fight sin is not simply through specific fighting of that specific sin, but by continuing into a life of holistic practices that reshape your entire being.

Hair part. I described it to someone the other day this way, hopefully this will be helpful to you – have you ever tried to change the way your hair is parted? This is not a personal example, ok? But you know if you've ever gone from a left to right part to a right to left or center part, it takes time. You have to stick with it as your hair is slowly reshaped into the other direction.

And I think that's a good example of how spiritual practices help you fight against sin. In our old selves, we learned an ingrained way of being in the world. We learned habits and practices that got down into our wiring and so part of how we fight specific sin, is by learning to rewire our whole self – body, soul, and mind into the ways of Jesus.

For example:

- If you're trying to fight idolatry in your life, worshiping something or someone that is not God by making it central in your life instead of him. You don't put that to death by simply trying to stop. You also commit to showing up faithfully to the Gathering on Sundays. And as you worship, as you lift your hands, as you say "amen", as you read liturgies, as you take communion, that helps reshape you as a whole person away from idolatry and towards true worship of God.
- If you're trying to put gossip and slander to death in your life, you don't do that by simply trying to gossip or slander less. You also commit more deeply to your community group. Because when you train yourself to show up and engage and care for other Christians even when you don't want to, that reshapes you as a whole person more and more away from gossip and towards love.

Consistent spiritual practices are part of how we are reshaped as whole people over time to desire Jesus more, have more of an appetite for the things of God and who in return look more and more like Christ and say "no" more and more to sin.

- **We agree with God that sin is sin and sin is serious.**
- **We seek a robust life of mundane ordinary spiritual practices.**

3. We submit ourselves to Holy Spirit renewal.

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.

We started this morning by defining sanctification very specifically as **the work of God**, over the course of our lives, where **He shapes us**, through our active participation, to look more like Jesus.

Look at the verb tense of verse 10 - "Which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

Passive tense, not active tense. So we have a role to play, yes, absolutely – we agree with God sin is sin and sin is serious. We act in accordance with that agreement by laboring to put sin to death. We learn to step into everyday spiritual practices that over time reshape our whole selves to desire and look like Jesus.

But what we're doing in all of that is just trying to put ourselves, in the words of one pastor, under the waterfall of God's grace. I'm trying to position myself through my Holy-Spirit empowered actions, to receive and submit to Holy Spirit inner renewal.

And I think part of how we do this is through those spiritual practices we mentioned earlier, but also by taking an honest look at the everyday stuff of our lives through the framework – **does this help me be more in love with Jesus or not?**

That's a great question to help you think through the "gray" parts of life – does this help me put sin to death and love Jesus more?

- This TV show I've been watching, does it help me be more in love with Jesus or not?
- This music I'm listening to, does it help me be more in love with Jesus or not?
- This person I'm dating, do they help me be more in love with Jesus or not?
- My sleep habits, my eating habits, (we're embodied beings) – do they help me be more in love with Jesus or not?

Is the stuff of my everyday life creating space for the Holy Spirit to renew me, or distracting or diminishing His work in my life?

SO:

- **What do we put to death? Sin.**
- **How do we put sin to death? Agree with God it's sin and sin is serious. Ordinary spiritual practices. Creating space for Holy Spirit renewal.**

But then that leads to the most important part of the whole sermon. Do not check out on me. I need you to not miss this. You miss this, well don't.

Why do we put sin to death?

Look back at v5 with me, where we started today. There was a crucial word right in the middle of it:

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...

My pastor growing up used to always say – "If you want to be a good Bible reader, learn to ask 'what is the therefore, there for?'" Which is cheesy. But helpful. What Paul is doing is grounding all of what follows verse 5 in what he just told us in verses 1-4. SO we put sin to death, because of whatever he just reminded us of previously.

What is that? Well look with me...verse 1...

1 If then you have been raised with Christ seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Kill sin! Put to death what is earthly in you! Why? **Because you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

Let's break this down for a second...

When you become a Christian, when you put your faith in Jesus – you participate, according to the Scriptures, with Christ in His death and resurrection.

- Just as Christ died physically, you too die spiritually to what the Bible calls your old self. Your flesh. Your sin nature – That dies. It's done away with.
- And just as Christ rose from the dead physically, you too rise spiritually to what the Bible calls a new self. A new creation.

Symbol of baptism

Romans 6:6-8, 11 – 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him...11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

So when you put your faith in Jesus and receive the free gift of salvation from God – part of what happens is that you become dead to sin. Sin has been put to death within you. Meaning – you are set free!

- You are set free from the **penalty** of sin – you are no longer under judgment or condemnation. You are no longer bearing the guilt and penalty and punishment for your sins.
- But you're also set free from the **power** of sin. Your old self has died. You can say no to sin. You are not a slave, you are free. You can choose holiness.

Why do you kill the action and attitude of sin in your life? Because Christ on the cross has already killed the penalty and power of sin in your life.

Glitter. A few weeks ago Harper, our 3 year old, came home from preschool with every parent's worst nightmare – a craft with glitter on it. It was this 8.5x11 piece of paper and it was just glitter, pure glitter. And she's so excited running around the house with it. And you're watching her shake it and you're just like "NOOOO", right? Glitter everywhere. So eventually we did what every smart parent would do in that situation – we waited until she was asleep, threw it away, and then told her it had to go bye bye.

But here's what happens – even though I threw the craft away, the craft is dead...what am I still doing weeks later (and will probably for the next few months to come), everytime I sit on the couch in our playroom, I see little specks of glitter that still remain. And I have to pick them up, take them off the couch, and throw them in the garbage. They still get all over my clothes. The glitter craft has been destroyed, but the remains still live on and must be dealt with.

That's the image Paul is painting for us – you have died. What was earthly in you does not reign over you anymore. You are no longer a slave to your earthly passions and desires. You're in Christ! You're a new creation with a new heart, new desires, new love!

But there's still those pieces that are lingering. Those ingrained habits and rhythms of life that must be dealt with. We must still kill the pieces of sin and habits of sin that remain.

Why? Because that's not who we are anymore!

Look at verse 9, this will hopefully make this make sense...

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.

I used to think verse 9 was Paul's kind of final tack on to the list. One more thing he just sort of wanted to add in - put to death anger, malice, and (oh yeah) lying. But that's actually not what he's addressing here. He's addressing the idea of false living.

Put away all these things, kill your sin, Paul says – because if you keep living into these things you’re lying to one another. You’re living an identity that is not true. If you’ve put your faith in Jesus – you’ve died to what is earthly and risen again with Christ – stop lying by living a life that is incongruent with that.

You have a deeper identity now. You’re not a Greek. You’re not a Jew. You’re in Christ!

You’re a Christian! Kill sin because you’re a Christian!

And your life is now hidden with Christ in God. You are now a child of the heavenly. You are now a new creation, a royal priest, a chosen child in the family of God.

I just want to make sure we’re grounded in this. **If you are a Christian, raised with Christ is your new identity. Do you hear that or receive that? If you’ve put your faith in Jesus...your truest identity is no longer sinner.**

I know that’s how we can posture ourselves sometimes. We show up to group, we confess our sin and we kind of shrug our shoulders – “I know, I’m a sinner.” But that’s not actually your identity anymore if you are in Christ Jesus.

You are a saint!

This is how Paul addresses every letter he writes to the churches:

- 1 Cor 1 - you are saints by calling.
- Ephesians 1 – saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus
- Phil 1 - Saints in Christ Jesus
- Jude 1 – you’ve received the faith handed down to the saints

If you’re in Christ you’re not a sinner – you’re a saint. The sinner has died with Christ. You’re raised to newness of life. That’s your new identity! So why do we kill sin? Because we’re now saints, not sinners.

Hear me on this.

This is what distinguishes legalism from discipline. Because the temptation is going to be to hear a strong call to put sin to death and call it legalism! Well that’s just legalism! We’re saved by grace. I agree. Legalism – thinking you can earn your way to God. Thinking you can live a good enough life to make God love you – that’s anti-Bible, anti-Jesus. It’s not true. I’m not preaching legalism. Colossians 3 isn’t teaching legalism. It’s teaching discipline.

Because here’s the key. If you hear nothing else hear this:

Saying no to sin doesn’t make you a Christian.

Being a Christian makes you say no to sin.

Peterson. I had a close friend in high school that was a part of one of “those families”. You know what I’m talking about. Like they’re all too close. They have their own family hashtag. (No shame if that’s you, just know you’re one of those). And it was sort of weird, but one of the things that I find really admirable, especially now that I’m building my own family is how clearly his family identity shaped his behavior.

Whenever we would be hanging out and wanting to get into trouble, as you do in high school, you always got the same response from this kid. He would always say – “Sorry, I’m a Peterson, we don’t do that.”

- Hey man, you want to go TP that person’s yard? Sorry, I’m a Peterson, we don’t do that.
- Hey man, you want to prank call that nerdy kid at school? Sorry, I’m a Peterson, we don’t do that.

- You want to go mess with the workers at Walmart (I lived in a small town ok?) Sorry, I'm a Peterson, we don't do that.

He's not a Peterson BECAUSE he says "no" to things. He says "no" to things because He's a Peterson.

This is who I am, so I don't do these things. That's the posture of Colossians 3.

I'm not putting sin to death to become a Christian.
I'm a Christian, therefore I start putting my sin to death.

Because being a Christian – and all that entails – God's love for you, His kindness and mercy to you in Christ – that is the only lasting and sustainable and life-changing why that could ever keep you putting sin to death in your life.

"I'm a Christian!"

- **You want to offer sexual immorality to me?** Swipe-left hookup culture? No thanks, I'm a Christian. I'm loved by the God of the universe who knows me deeply and calls me His own.
- **You want to lure me with coveting, doubting the goodness of God?** No thanks, I'm a Christian. I'm a child of the king with an eternal inheritance that is kept pure and undefiled for me with God forever.
- **You want to tempt me to be burned up by my anger and bitterness?** No thanks, I'm a Christian. The one who never sinned died for me and shows me daily undeserved grace. I can surely show that too.
- **Alright soul, you feel drawn to slander?** No thanks, I'm a Christian. God speaks over me nothing but delight, so I can speak over others the same.

And on and on and on we go. Learning to live deeper into who God has already declared us to be.

If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are heavenly, and put to death what is earthly.

Pray for folks.