

# Paul's Practice 1: Forsaking Earth (Colossians 3:5-11)

To Read:

1. Romans 6:1-14
2. Ephesians 4:17 - 5:14

## 1 I. Introduction

### A. This morning we're starting the third section of Colossians in Colossians 3:5-11

1. But, again, before we start, I want to remember what Colossians is about and how Colossians is organized
- 1 2. So, we'll start with our purpose statement for Colossians: Colossians calls us to see how truly glorious Jesus is and to root all of our hope in Him knowing that He is true wisdom to meet our every need. This will prevent us from instead pursuing the hopes and purposes of this world and being captured by worldly wisdom.
- 1 3. And the outline we're Colossians, we are looking at Colossians in four parts:
  - 1 a. Rooted in the Gospel (~ chapter 1)
  - 1 b. Refusing Worldly Wisdom (~ chapter 2)
  - 1 c. Renewed in Christ (~ chapter 3)
  - 1 d. Relational Truth (~ chapter 4)
- 1 4. Last week, we finished the second section of Colossians which warned the Colossians against getting entangled with worldly philosophy and being trapped
  - 1 a. And we finished last week by looking at Paul's Theology: Dead and alive in Christ - the reason the Colossians can't be wrapped up in this world is found in the gospel - they died to this world with Christ and their new life is found in another world where Christ is and their whole lives should be oriented around that truth

### 1 B. As we continue on, this morning we starting the third section of Colossians: Renewed in Christ

1. In the last section, refusing worldly wisdom, Paul told the Colossians what they can't be doing if they are hoping in the gospel: they can't be following worldly wisdom, submitting to things in this world
2. But if they're not to be captured by worldly wisdom, what should they be doing? Paul's described a negative sense of practically living out your hope in the gospel, but how do we positively live out the gospel in our lives?
3. That's what this third section describes: what the Colossians should be devoting themselves to - what does true religion look like, what actions accompany hoping in the gospel?
- 3 4. We're going to cover this section in four or five weeks and we're going to see that Paul's practice is forsaking the earth, Paul's practice is rooted in the local church and Paul's practice is embracing heaven

### C. This section, like all of Paul's theology, flows straight from the gospel

1. In fact, Paul uses the same words to introduce this section that he used when describing the gospel - if you have died then you should be dead - now he adds - so be dying
2. And actually marking the dividing line between the second and third section of Colossians is hard because we already turned the page into positive teaching last week when we consider the resurrection of Christ
3. Paul's theology bridged the divide between what the Colossians shouldn't be pursuing and what they should be pursuing - they can't be in bondage to the things of this world because the gospel tells them that they are dead to this world, but the gospel also tells them that they are alive in another and therefore they need to pursue the qualities of the next world
4. So Paul's teaching is going to be, "live the gospel" - if the core of the gospel is that you died then act dead to this world and be killing any fragments of the world that you find in you

### D. So let's read Colossians 3:5-11

- 2 1. Again, you can follow along in your Bibles, or I'll have the text up here on the screen

### 1 E. Proposition: If we have died with Christ then we need to live out Christ's death in our lives, we can't continue as we once were, so we must be putting sin to death

- 1 1. Some observations about this passage
- 1 2. The exhortations of this passage

## 1 II. Some observations about this passage

### A. As I've meditated on our passage this week, I realized that much of my meditation wasn't on things that would come out in a verse by verse exposition

1. There is a lot more to this paragraph than simply understanding all the words - in fact, what is not there may be just as important as what is, and how this relates to other parts of Colossians is important as well
2. So, I'll start this morning by making some observations about this paragraph in Colossians so that we can understand its full force when we consider the words that are there

### 1 B. First, Paul's exhortations recognize that there will be sin in our lives

1. Paul starts his exhortation by acknowledging that there are parts of us that still belong to the earthly man, things in us that belong to this earth, that belong to this sinful realm - these are the things we are to be putting to death
2. So, he doesn't say, "if you happen to find earthly things in you" - instead he says, "put to death what is earthly in you"
3. In a way, this is an encouraging statement - in the last two paragraphs, Paul has preached the truth of the gospel that we are dead to this world and alive in Christ, but that could leave us feeling condemned if we find sin in our lives
4. When we come face to face with continuing sin in our lives, we can start to wonder: Have I not died to this world? Am I still part of it? Do I not have any part in Christ's death? Does this sin in my life forfeit my hope in the gospel?
5. But Paul here says that if I have died with Christ and have lived with Christ I should expect to find sin in my life
6. I should expect to see evidence that there was an earthly me and he is still clinging to life as hard as he can - Paul says that still exists and we shouldn't be overthrown by this truth, instead he tells us how to react to this truth: fight back
7. When we find sin in our lives, we shouldn't despair of hope in the gospel, instead we need to take hold of the gospel and fight back, take the death of the gospel and use it to put to death our old selves
8. So don't despair over sin and don't deny sin, instead take hold of the gospel and fight back - the only sin that can defeat you is the sin that you allow free reign in your life

### 1 C. Second, Paul's exhortations acknowledge sin for what it is

1. So Paul recognizes that there is still sin in our life, but he doesn't do that to excuse it or to paper over sin
2. Instead, Paul calls sin what it is - you should expect to find lingering evidences in you of sexual immorality, impurity, passions, evil desires, covetousness - and that's exactly what it is, no less
  - a. And I think this is important, because there can be an unholy fear of sin in our lives, perhaps founded on a fear of man or a desire for self-righteousness, that is so scared to find sin in our lives that we resort to calling it something else, papering over our sins with different terms, blaming what is really sin manifesting in our lives on something else
  - b. But Paul would say that's a futile and foolish effort, call it what it is - when you find lust in your life call it what it is: sexual immorality, a rebellion against God, a rejection of His beauty and then fight against it - don't excuse it, or paper it over with bland words, or blame its consequences on something else - name sin for what it is and then fight it with the gospel
3. And, in a way, this is at the core of Paul's exhortation because this contrasts with the 'self-made' religious activities that Paul condemns at the end of chapter two
  - a. Flashy spirituality and quick-fix religiosity often appears wise because it denies the root of sin - instead of calling sin what it is, it convinces you that the problem is somewhere else and you can deal with its consequences with superficial measures - with better rules, stricter practices, convincing yourself and others that you are very spiritual
  - b. This is one major way we can identify 'self-made' religion verses true discipleship - self-made religion will try to fix our lives by blaming our problems on something other than sin - it will look like serious devotion, but it won't penetrate to the core, calling sin what it is and giving us the gospel to fight against it
4. So when you find sin in your life, call it what it is so you can take the gospel to that sin and bring it to death - don't look for easy ways out that deny or minimize sin, that's denying the power of the gospel and makes it powerless in your life

### 1 D. Third, Paul's exhortations are all rooted in the gospel

1. Throughout this paragraph Paul keeps returning to the gospel that he referenced in the last two paragraphs
2. If you can remember back to last week, we went through the gospel in three statements that showed how our identification in Christ's death and resurrection is the gospel
  - a. The gospel starts when we recognize that the best possible thing that could happen to us is death - our sin is so bad that there's nothing we can do to fix it, we just simply need to die
  - b. But that's the glory of the gospel because Christ came to earth, taking on a body like ours to identify with us and take us to death - And more than that, the gospel doesn't just lead us to death because Christ didn't stay dead, He continued to identify with us, rising again in His body, so that in Him we can new life in Him

3. And Paul roots his exhortations in this paragraph to all three points
  - a. He calls us to root our fight against sin in remembering how bad sin was
    - i. In verse 6 he says - *On account of these the wrath of God is coming.* - these things are really bad, your recognition of how bad they were pushed you to the gospel, so don't keep living in them
    - ii. If you have agreed with God that the best thing that you can do is die, don't keep living that same life
  - b. He calls us to root our fight against sin in the fact that we have died in Christ
    - i. So he says in verse 5 - *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you* - These are words that Paul used to describe the gospel, in chapter 2 verse 20- *with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world* - again in chapter 3 verse 3 - *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*
    - ii. If you died with Christ then take that truth and make it real in your life: be making yourself dead to sin
  - c. And he calls us to root our fight against sin in the fact that we have been given new life in Christ
    - i. So he says in verse 9-10 - *seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*
    - ii. We didn't just die, we were raised, we were given a new self, a new image and that image shouldn't look like the old image, it shouldn't be corrupted by the same things - make this real in your life!
4. The gospel is at the core of everything Paul calls the Colossians to, these aren't merely exhortations to be better, to have a claim to self-righteousness; Paul is calling them to live in the gospel, to be what they already are
  - a. Fighting sin without the gospel is hopeless, the only way to fight sin is to take it to the gospel so that it can die at the cross of Christ, so don't try harder to defeat sin, take it to the gospel and let it die there

**1 E. Fourth, Paul's exhortations all have to do with heart attitudes, not external actions**

1. This is a major contrast with how Paul describes the philosophies of this world - the apparent wisdom that was rooted in this world all focused on the outside, the external actions - it made rules about what you can and can't do
  - a. It tried to give the appearance of defeating sin without ever dealing with sin, it made the outside clean without ever reaching the source and the root of sin
  - b. It looked very humble, very devoted, very self-controlled, but Paul says it never got close to killing the desires of the flesh, it didn't attack heart attitudes
2. So when Paul tells the Colossians what they should pursue instead, he doesn't go through lists of rules - these activities are good, these activities are not permitted - instead he goes right to the heart of the matter
  - a. Paul wanted the Colossians to
3. Now, don't get me wrong - this doesn't mean that external actions are unimportant, Scripture strongly says otherwise
  - a. For example, Christ Himself says in Matthew 12:34-35 - *You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.*
4. But it does mean that true gospel change isn't first concerned with the outside, it's concerned with the heart
  - a. The true disciple isn't going to be satisfied with surface changes, he is going to pursue sin to its core and all change will start at the core, turning his heart away from sin and toward the gospel
  - b. And because of that the true disciple will make rules for himself, but rules that are designed to help him turn his heart from sin and toward the gospel, not rules that mean he did the right thing
  - c. The rules he makes for himself will be rooted in these concerns: Is this thing sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness? Then I can't do it. Is this thing encouraging me toward sexual immorality, impurity...? Then I can't do it. Is this thing helping me to flee, to put to death sexual immorality? Then I should run after it.

**1 F. Finally, Paul's exhortations primarily focus on relationships, building a new community in Christ**

1. Paul starts with the heart in verse 5 (sexual immorality...covetousness), but quickly moves toward how the heart reacts toward others (anger, wrath, malice, slander), and how we interact with each other (shameful talk)
2. By the end of the paragraph, Paul is calling us to live out the gospel in a way that fosters Christ-centered community - not lying to each other, but recognizing our unity in Christ
3. In fact verse 11 which ends our passage this morning is a transition verse between the fighting-sin section and the putting-on section and we'll consider this at some length next time we're in Colossians
4. But the hinge at the center is all about Christ-centered community - we fight sin as part of a community of believers and we fight sin so that we can have true, Christ-centered community together
5. Fighting sin isn't a personal issue, fighting sin is a community issue - we fight sin for each other and we fight sin with each other - so, we shouldn't be hiding sin from each other, but rather confessing sin to each other, exhorting one another, encouraging each other in the fight
6. Local churches are important because local churches is where sin dies and we need to make our local church a place where sin can die - not where it can hide, not where it is ignored, not where it is judged, but where it dies because the local church is where we live out the gospel together

### 1 III. The exhortations in this passage

#### 1 A. Now that we've gotten some observations out of the way, we can turn and think through what the passage says

1. And our passage is summed up in the first phrase this morning - *put to death therefore what is earthly in you*
2. Paul's continuing his exposition of the gospel in the positive sense now, saying "if you died, then be being dead" - if we have embraced the gospel, then we need to be fighting against sin in a mortal struggle, putting it to death in our lives
3. And this is an active exhortation, an exhortation to do something - the verb here at the beginning is an active aorist verb, an action verb that doesn't have a beginning or an end, a stern call to continual action - we need to be actively fighting, putting sin to death in our lives
4. We don't belong to the earth anymore so we can't be living like we belong to the earth anymore - its life isn't our life, its passions aren't our passions, its hope isn't our hope, so its actions shouldn't be our actions
5. And then as we go through the paragraph, Paul identifies three areas of life that we need to take the battle to - we need to be killing three kinds of things if we are embracing the gospel - so let's look at those three things:

#### 1 B. First, we need to be killing Christ-dishonoring hearts (3:5-6)

1. As soon as Paul gives his command, he follows it up with five examples: *sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness*
  - 1 a. Sexual immorality is fairly self-explanatory, it is desiring and acting on sexual pleasure in a way that rejects the beauty and order that God created in it, valuing sex more than God and therefore misusing it to dishonor God
  - 1 b. Impurity is a little harder to define - technically it means ritual uncleanness, a frequent topic of the Old Testament, and I think Paul means something like rejecting the joy of God and instead pursuing shameful things
    - i. He uses the word in Ephesians 4 to characterize the entire lives of those who reject God, Ephesians 4:18-19 - *They [gentiles] are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*
    - ii. Impurity is the essence of the godless life, running after pleasures that have nothing to do with God
  - c. The words just keep getting broader as we go on, passions literally means passions, deep emotions - now I don't think Paul is saying we need to be stoics, denying our emotions, but he is saying we shouldn't be controlled by our emotions, blown here and there by our desires without control
    - i. Paul uses the word to describe lack of control in I Thessalonians 4:4-5 - *that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God*
    - ii. Lust is a passion that could control and consume us, but we shouldn't be being controlled by our passions
  - 1 d. The fourth phrase, evil desires, is less vague, fortunately - perhaps Paul felt himself getting vague as he went down the list and starts to pull it back - you can't be desiring things that are evil, things opposed to Christ
  - 1 e. And finally, covetousness, literally desiring more - we can't set our minds on getting more things in this world, building up our fortunes here - literally this word is the description of the "American Dream", that shouldn't be our desire, our passion, our guiding principle, the standard we measure ourselves against
2. So why does Paul start with this list? What connects these things and makes them the first victims in our war on sin?
  - a. The thing that connects these five words is they all involve our mind desiring something other than Christ, our heart valuing something beside Christ, we are finding our joy and fulfillment in something other than Christ
  - b. We can desire sex more than Christ, we can desire anything besides Christ, we can be so controlled by our Christ-less passions that we have no self-control, we can desire evil, the opposite of Christ, we can desire to have more things instead of Christ - all of these find their root in the desires of the heart - what is your heart desiring?
  - 1 c. Paul finishes his list by making this clear, because he finishes with "which is idolatry" - technically in the Greek idolatry is referring back specifically to covetousness - desiring more in this world is idolatry, trading the glory of God for created things
  - d. But, I don't think Paul is meaning that only the last item on his list is idolatry because the list started with something that is clearly connected in the Old Testament to idolatry - sexual immorality
  - e. So I think Paul's thinking is something like this - sexual immorality (which everyone knows is idolatry) is out of bounds for the Christ as is uncleanness (also connected to idolatry in the Old Testament), passion, evil desires - and covetousness is the same way, this is also idolatry
  - f. So he says - *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is [also] idolatry.*
  - g. These things are all idolatry, they are setting your heart on something other than God, desiring something other than Christ - and these desires of your heart are at the root of all sin
3. So we need to be killing Christ-dishonoring hearts - we need to be continually diagnosing our hearts, determining what we are really desiring, then we need to be killing the earthly desires we find there and directing our hearts back to Christ - our hearts should be consumed by Him and by Him only

**1 C. Second, we need to be killing Christ-dishonoring relationships (3:7-8)**

1. As Paul continues in verses 7-8, he adds a second list of five words, a second topic for us to war against
  - a. And the second five words all have to do with ways we relate towards others - they are still things that start in the heart, but they are heart attitudes that react toward others, attitudes that we bear toward others
- 1 2. So Paul adds five more things to put off, to put to death: *anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk*
  - a. Fortunately, most of these are easier to clearly identify than some things in the last list
  - 2 b. Anger in the Greek literally means settled opposition, I dislike this person and I don't want him to succeed, which is contrasted with wrath, which literally means angry passion, reacting with temporal anger in the moment - both of these are out of bounds for the Christian
  - 3 c. Then Paul adds malice - desiring ill toward someone, slander - speaking in a way as to harm someone's reputation, and finishes with obscene talk - literally shameful talk, talk that doesn't encourage each other in Christ
3. So all of these things are rooted in how we relate to one another
  - a. Our death in Christ should affect us at the core, but then it should move out and affect how we live in Christian relationships - our relationships with each other can't be marked by the same things that mark the world
  - b. And Paul recognizes that these things mark the world, these things seem very normal, in fact, you once lived in these things, but if you died in Christ, these things can't characterize you anymore
  - c. Your heart needs to be conformed to Christ and then your relationships need to be conformed to Christ - in fact, it is in relationships that we can often best diagnose whether we are being conformed to Christ - when we are with others, relating to others, we can see clear signs of sanctification or lack thereof
4. So put to death, put off these things - don't let these attitudes characterize your relationships, especially your relationships in the church - conform your relationships to the pattern of Christ

**1 D. Third, we need to be killing Christ-dishonoring community (3:9-11)**

- 1 1. As we come to verses 9-11, Paul adds one more thing to put to death - *do not lie to one another*
  - 1 a. This one doesn't come in a list of five, but it does have a clear distinctive - it is the first use of the phrase 'one another' here in this section - the list of community vices and virtues
  - b. Paul is building up from our hearts, to how we relate to other individuals, up to how we live together as a community - our hearts can't be marked by worldly desires, our relationships can't look like the world, and our community should be an other-worldly community.
  - c. And the community of the church, the community of Christ shouldn't be like the world, based on lies, deceit, false airs - instead the community of Christ should be based on Christ, who is the truth
  - d. So Paul moves from lying to one another to what the essence of the church is by verse 11 - and I'm not going to cover verses 10-11 in depth this morning, I'll cover those more next time
  - e. But community in Christ is at the heart of this last exhortation - as a community we can't be lying to one another, our community, our communion can't be built on lies, it must be built on the truth of Christ
2. So we need to be purposefully representing ourselves in truth and purposefully speaking truth to one another
  - a. We can't have a Christian community that's based in representing ourselves to each other as better than we are, we can't have a Christian community that's based in shallow things, lying about who we are to each other
  - b. We need to be speaking truth to each other, speaking the things of Christ to each other, encouraging each other in Christ and not the lies of this world
  - c. Now this doesn't mean we need to be brutal toward each other, in other places Paul would add '*speak the truth in love*' - not lying to each other means loving each other with the truth of Christ
  - d. So we need to be working together to be killing everything in our community that is opposed to Christ and to be building our community in the truth of Christ
  - e. Sanctification is most clearly seen in a new community, a community that looks infinitely different than the world, a community that has been made new in Christ
3. So strive together for this - don't let airs, misrepresentations, shallow things, worldly things be the basis of our relationship with each other, the topic of our conversations with each other - strive to be putting on Christ in all of our words to each other and all of our deeds with each other - show that you are a new creation in Christ by living it out in a radically new community - show that you embrace the gospel by embracing it here with us

**E. So as we leave this morning we have a clear choice before us**

1. Are we going to be living out the gospel in our lives, living out our death in Christ by dying to those things which are opposed to Christ? Or are we going to deny the gospel and allow these things free reign in our lives?
2. Finding that sin is still with you, is still in you is not a threat to the gospel, but how you react to it is - you can ignore sin and let go of the gospel, or you can confront sin with the gospel - those are your only two choices
3. So let's go out and make the gospel real in our lives: live as what you are, take sin to the cross and put it to death there