

BETHEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
FAIR LAWN, NJ
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“Dealing With Sin”
Colossians 3:5-11

The Apostle Paul was many things, but “politically correct” wasn’t one of them. He never shied away from speaking the truth. He never apologized for speaking the truth. If he thought he could help people, he wasn’t afraid of offending them by telling them the truth. This was especially the case when it came to broaching the subject of sin.

Unlike so many of today’s churches, Paul warned the churches of his day about the dangers of sin. He also named sins, both the sensual sins and the more acceptable social sins. He wanted everyone to know that all sin belongs to the old life and has no place in the new life in Christ. He was also clear that those who live sinful lives will face the final judgment.

That is what makes this passage of Scripture so politically incorrect. It speaks to us about the serious nature of sin, without making any apology to those who may be offended by such language. It also causes us to realize that we are never to accept sin (“that’s just the way God made me,”) or excuse sin (“nobody’s perfect, and I could be worse”). Instead, this passage teaches us that we are to deal radically with sin . . . to “mortify” it, or “put it to death” (v. 5). This is definitely a negative emphasis, and most people don’t like negatives.

But as is the case throughout Paul’s letters, the negative, ethical warnings beginning with verse 5 grow out of the positive, doctrinal truths found in verses 1-4. The connecting link is the all-important “therefore” of verse 5. The positive (verses 1-4) and the negative (verses 5-9) go together. One without the other leads to an imbalance. Therefore, in the words of a popular song a generation ago, we’ve got to “accentuate the positive” and “eliminate the negative.”

I. The Positive Foundation: Our Union With Christ (3:5)

As already noted, the “therefore” of verse 5 points us back to this foundational truth: we have died with Christ (3:3), and have been raised with Christ (3:1), and are now hidden with Christ (3:3), and will be united with Christ in His return (3:4); “therefore” our relationship with sin is to be radically altered. We can no longer live the lives we once lived, because we are no longer the people we once were. With a new identity comes a new incentive for living an entirely different way of life.

II. The Negative Exhortation: Put Sin To Death (3:5)

What exactly does this mean? Many helpful explanations have been given over the years, but one of the best comes from Dr. Sinclair Ferguson:

It is not accomplished only by saying ‘no’ to what is wrong, but by a determined

acceptance of all the good and spiritually-nourishing disciplines of the gospel. It is by resolutely weeding the garden of the heart, *and also* by planting, watering and nurturing Christian graces there, that putting sin to death will take place. Not only must we slay the noxious weeds of sin, but we must see that the flowers of grace are sucking up the nourishment of the Spirit's presence in our hearts. Only when those hearts are so full of grace will less room exist for sin to breathe and flourish. (Know Your Christian Life, pp. 143-144)

III. The Practical Implications (3:5-11)

If all this is true, then what practical difference does this really make to Christian living, and why does it really matter? Paul will leave us with no doubts.

A. What we must put off (3:5-9a)

There are two kinds of sinful practices that we are to put to death. In the first group (v. 5), Paul lists the sensual sins, linking sexual sin and covetousness together. These are the sins that obviously disrupt our relationship with God, oftentimes taking His place as the focus of our attention. When fellow Christians fall into this kind of sin, we are usually surprised and somewhat shocked.

But in the second group (vv. 8-9a), Paul lists the social sins. These are the wrong attitudes and harmful actions directed toward others, which inevitably lead to broken and fractured relationships in any local church fellowship. They have been referred to as "the sins in good standing." We are so accustomed to anger, critical attitudes, malicious gossip, slander, coarse humor, and lying that we are no longer upset or convicted about them at all. But like the other list of sins, these also *must* be viewed as part of the former way of life (vv. 6-7).

B. Why we can and must do so (vv. 9b-11)

Paul's argument now comes full circle. Because a change of identity has already taken place, in that we have "put off" the old self and have "put on" the new self, all that remains is for us to bring our behavior into line with our new identity. This is the ongoing process of spiritual transformation, by which the new self "is being renewed" through the working of God's Spirit within our hearts. It includes the daily putting to death of all fleshly behavior through a repentant lifestyle. It necessitates an increasing "knowledge" of Christ and conformity into the image of Christ, who is the "pattern" for all spiritual life. As a result, the new man can now live in a new environment where all racial, national, cultural and social distinctions no longer matter. Why? Because for the new man in Christ, Christ is all that matters!