

Title: Invoking the Death Penalty  
Date: March 17, 2019  
Subject: Christ followers are to deal seriously with sin  
Scripture: Colossians 3:1-11

READ Colossians 3:1-11

Keep in mind the underlying thought of the passage. Christ followers are being renewed and restored in the knowledge in and after the image of God. The New Living stresses it this way, “You have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you.” There’s a spiritual process taking place in their lives.

Chapter three continues the interplay between past completed truth of salvation and ongoing truth of sanctification, the living out of that salvation, though there’s some overlapping into each other’s area.

I. The irrefutable facts Vv. 1- 4, 9, 10

A. Raised with Christ (v. 1). The believer has been raised from the dead. It isn’t accomplished by one’s self-determination but it’s in the person’s connection with Christ.

B. Died (v. 3). Seems like this should have come before the coming back to life as that’s the natural course of events. Dying doesn’t mean ceasing to exist as the people Paul writes to are very much alive in the physical sense. Even when physical death occurs, the person doesn’t cease to exist but experiences the separation of the body from the soul. The death in v. 3 is that of dying to the idea that can save self, dying to the world’s value system, dying to the old life before coming to Christ.

C. Life hidden with Christ in God (v. 3). Where is Christ? V 1 tells us he’s seated at the right hand of God. He’s in heaven in his rightful position of power and authority. That’s all that amazing. It’s quite expected that the Almighty God of the universe would be where he is.

The amazing thing is that is where we are. We’re hidden with Christ. What does that mean? There are several ways to understand this. One is that our lives are protected. The devil can’t touch us. (M. C Hammer?). Another aspect of being hidden is the truth of who we are is concealed from the world. We may look like your average, ordinary, run-of-the-mill person but we’re actually quite different as we’ve been brought from death to life. Most importantly, being hidden means that when God looks at us he sees Christ. He sees us as holy. Jesus and we are united as one. Security and identity.

D. Christ is our life (v. 4). He is the source of life. We’re in a relationship with Christ as our Lord (2:6). He is true life in contrast to the false notions proclaimed by the false teachers. He’s involved in all of life’s activities and associations. We’re totally wrapped up in him. This carries the promise of being with Christ in heaven as a whole person with a glorified body rejoining the soul. Can bring in v. 11. He is all people need.

E. Have taken off the old self with its practices (v.9). F. Have put on the new self (v. 10). Deal with these two together as they comprise the analogy of changing clothes. When a person becomes a Christian, they

take off the old unregenerate self dominated by sin in its pre-Christian state and put on the new robe of Christ's perfect righteousness.

The ancient church envisioned this change in their baptismal ceremony. Many of the first century Christians were slaves and didn't have much in the way of possessions. When they entered the water to be baptized they wore their old dirty, torn clothes. When they came out of the water they were presented with a new white robe.

We quickly went through these six truths as they more or less summarize the book to this point. They're motivations for living. They provide hope, assurance and encouragement and aid in our perseverance.

## II. The course of action

None of this is a one and done. We begin with two similar phrases.

A. Set hearts on things above (v. 1). B. Set minds on things above (v. 2). Heart and mind are used to encompass the entire being – inner attitude, desire, center of thought, will and emotion. The idea of setting is deliberate continued action. It's striving for, searching for, seeking. It's not so much trying to find something but honing in on a target like a heat-seeking missile locked onto its target. Take the initiative to direct the mind and heart toward the truth. Seek passionately. Desire like a person living in exile who's longing for his home.

What are the things above on which we are to set our hearts and minds? It's not just thinking about heaven -- going through those pearly gates, walking on the streets of gold, gawking at people like Moses and Paul. Heaven is where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We don't refer to Christ as a "thing" but the implication throughout these verses and the book is that the main "thing" to focus on is Christ. A few verses back we're told that "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:4). His death for us. His resurrection that includes us. His reigning which is our reigning. View things from God's perspective. The things that are eternal. Live as if there is more than this world. Be heavenly minded so can be earthly good.

In contrast there are earthly things that we aren't to have are sights set on. These include stuff like fame, fortune, power, self, fleshly appetites, and sins. Adrian Rogers speaks of the things of the earthly things seen in chapter 2 – the reasonings, rituals, religions and regulations of the world." In contrast he summarizes by saying "Jesus is to captivate my ambition; dominate my attention...Jesus, who captivates my ambitions, Jesus, who dominates my attention, is the Jesus who is to regulate my actions" (sermoncentral.com, sermon When Christ is All). We'll get to that last part in a little bit.

Missionary pilot Bernie May writes, "One of the most difficult lessons to teach new pilots about landing on short, hazardous airstrips is to keep their eyes on the good part of the strip rather than on the hazard. The natural tendency is to concentrate on the obstacle, the danger, the thing he is trying to avoid. But experience teaches us that a pilot who keeps his eye on the hazard will sooner or later hit it dead center." The pilot will hit what he focuses on. The follower of Christ will hit what he focuses on.

Song, "Lord, I Need You" by Matt Maher. "Lord, I come, I confess. Bowing here I find my rest. Without You I fall apart. You're the One that guides my heart. Lord, I need You, oh, I need You. Every hour

I need You. My one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need You. Where sin runs deep Your grace is more. Where grace is found is where You are. Where You are, Lord, I am free. Holiness is Christ in me.”

C. Put to death (v. 5). A question may have popped into your mind when the passage was read or now that I’ve mentioned again the three words “put to death” – why do we need to put to death something that’s dead? Great question. Let’s sing the last song and meet back next week...

Parallel passages tell us to “to put off your old self, and to put on the new self” (Ephesians 4:22-24); “put aside the deeds of darkness, put on the armor of light, behave decently, clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and not think about or make provision as to how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:12-14); flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18); “have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11); “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1); “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Don’t offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness...Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:11-13). We serve the master we choose.

Counting selves dead to something is getting close to the tone of Colossians but performing the deed is way beyond the counting. There’s a closer parallel in Romans 8:13, “if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body.”

Why is the command about separation from sins worded more harshly here than at other times? Were the Colossians worse sinners than the others? Why couldn’t they just flee or not think about or put off the old?

Here’s the truth we need to face up to. There are times when we have to deal more severely with sin. Sometimes we can easily not think about it or run from it. There are others times when we have to plunge the dagger into it and tell it to die.

University of Alabama football fan Harvey Updyke, Jr is typical in his feelings toward rival Auburn. “I just don’t like Auburn. You know, there are several things in this world that I really and truly don’t like, and Auburn is one of them.” He’s non-typical in the way he showed his disdain. He poisoned the Auburn campus’ historic Toomer’s Oak Trees that guard the campus entrance and where victorious fans gather to celebrate. Updyke used a specialty herbicide called Spike 80DF and used 500 times the amount needed to kill the trees.

The reason for the extremely drastic treatment is the wrath of God is coming and keeps coming on those who live contrary to his will, those who are uncaring about sin, unrepentant. James Boice (*Romans: The Reign of Grace* [Baker], 2:826) puts it bluntly, “Paul is saying that if you live like a non-Christian, dominated by your sinful nature rather than living according to the Holy Spirit, you will perish like a non-Christian—because you are a non-Christian.”

Pastor Ray Stedman, “I find many Christians are confused as to just when they are being hypocritical. Nobody, of course, wants to be a hypocrite. But many Christians think they are being a hypocrite when they know that inwardly they have evil temptations but nevertheless they go to church and sing the hymns, etc. What the Bible says, however, is that a Christian is a hypocrite when he gives way to those wrong things. That is when he is no longer being what he really is. You are being your true self when you praise God and respond with love, joy and peace. That is when you are real. You are a phony, a hypocrite, when you give way to evil attitudes and practices.” (Ray Stedman, [raystedman.org/new-testament/colossians/true-human-potential](http://raystedman.org/new-testament/colossians/true-human-potential)).

REREAD v. 5. “Put to death.” Not just restrain it. Some believers sought to do so by adopting an ascetic lifestyle where they harshly treated their bodies – slept in caves during winter with no blankets, beat themselves with sticks. Wrong idea. On the other end we certainly shouldn’t coddle it or make excuses for it as if it weren’t a big deal.

You may remember a video we showed of Bob Newhart as a psychologist counseling a woman patient who’s complaining of various problems. He addresses all of them with two words -- “Stop It!” This is “Kill it!”

During the church prayer meetings one man would frequently confess the same sin. “Oh God, since the last time we talked the spider has returned and spun its web.” Another man who heard the repeated prayers, “Oh God, kill the spider.”

In this particular situation the Lord through Paul focuses on the areas of sexual sin and greed which some have brought into the arena as the beginning the desire for sexual sin. Sexual temptation and sin strikes at the core fabric of our being, of who we are. This kind of temptation is persistently in front of us as we’re surrounded by a world system that constantly promotes almost all forms of sexual expression outside the marriage relationship between a man and a woman as being okay, to say nothing about what our minds are capable of. The sins are not just the act but the dedicated thoughts, intentions and desires that lead to the act and would if given the opportunity.

How do we put to death whatever belongs to our sinful nature? For an exhaustive treatment, Puritan John Owen wrote 300 pages in *Temptation and Sin* on how to kill/mortify the flesh. Easier to read versions and summaries are available. Greg Herrick condensed Owen to three points, “It means to (1) constantly weaken the power of sin throughout life; (2) to constantly fight against sin, and (3) to have continual and habitual success against sin” ([bible.org/seriespage/general-rule-2-there-must-be-universal-sincerity-obedience](http://bible.org/seriespage/general-rule-2-there-must-be-universal-sincerity-obedience)).

People who are engaged in sins such as pornography, homosexuality, immorality of any kind including the thought world need to take drastic action. In the movie *Fireproof* Kirk Cameron’s character was heavily involved in pornography. He finally and decisively dealt with it. You may remember the scene where he’s in the yard beating on the computer with a baseball bat.

Kill what belongs to the earthly nature where it begins at the thought level before it has a chance to emerge full blown. Admit it’s sin, repent, claim Christ’s help as we now have his power in us to obey. We didn’t

have the ability before we were saved. Set our minds and heart on the things above as in focus of vv. 1 & 2. We are to sow seeds to the Spirit and not to the sin nature (Galatians 6:8). It's a matter of the will.

Starve it to death. Don't feed it anymore. Don't peruse the magazines at the checkout. Don't check out the stories or ads on the side bars of the computer. Choose righteous behavior. David in the Psalms, "I do not sit with the deceitful, nor do I associate with hypocrites. I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked" (Psalm 26:4,5). The more we choose the right the easier it is to keep on the path (Romans 13:13; 2 Peter 3:11). The same is true for doing evil. The more we do it the easier it is to keep doing it.

Replace what belongs to the earthly nature with what belongs to the heavenly one. Thomas Chalmers, Scottish Presbyterian minister, states the principle of attraction in our spiritual life -- "There is not one personal transformation in which the heart is left without an object of ultimate beauty and joy. The heart's desire for one particular object can be conquered... but its desire to have some object is unconquerable. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one."

D. Get rid of vv. 8 & 9. When we come to what's been called "social sins" of vv. 8 & 9 we're told to get rid of them. This "lighter" language doesn't mean we get a pass if we do these and not do v. 5. They're still serious. V. 7 brings up the past. You used to walk in these ways (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We're to renounce, cast off and throw away. The stuff of the old life is to have no influence.

There are various ways to describe these and there is some overlap. Anger - smoldering, resentful bitterness. Rage - blaze of sudden anger, temper tantrum, violent attack by word or action. Malice - vicious disposition of ill-will which promotes injury to others. Slander - insult, disparage that destroys. Filthy language - lewd, indecent, immodest, obscene or abusive language, using word to replace swear word (cf. Ephesians 5:4).

John Piper ("How to Kill Sin," Pt. 1, on [DesiringGod.org](http://DesiringGod.org)) explains, "Putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit – the daily practice of killing sin in your life – is the result of being justified and the evidence that you are justified by faith alone apart from works of the law...If you are not at odds with sin, you are not at home with Jesus, *not* because being at odds with sin makes you at home with Jesus, but because being at home with Jesus makes you at odds with sin."

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and **take up** their **cross** daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The cross is an instrument of death. Die daily. Die more often if necessary.

Julie grumbled as she dusted the glass tabletop. "How did everything get so dirty so fast? I had the whole house clean a month ago." Her husband responded, "Cleaning is a way of life, not an event." (Julie Ackerman Link, *Our Daily Bread*, 9/10/04). The same is true of our lives.

Return to v. 11. Similar words are used in Galatians 3:26-9. There the emphasis is the unity of all people who know Christ as savior. They are one body. Here the intent is to show that no one can use their background as an excuse to sin. All Christ followers have put on the new life and are being renewed. Christ is for all people. Live out in practice according to the new life as changed people.