



Sermon – June 6, 2021
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 3:7 – 10

Matthew 5:21 - 24

Let's open our Bibles together. We're going to spend our time in Colossians 3, verses 7 through the first part of 9. Colossians 3, verse 7 is where we'll begin this morning. And as I mentioned, this marks one year of being back together. And I'll never forget that first Sunday we were all back in those two services. Because I remember coming to the end of the service and as we closed with the benediction, spontaneous applause broke out in the crowd. And it wasn't because of something I said or something I did, there was just this deep seated joy that at last we were finally back together. At last we were able to feast on God's word. And here's what I want to ask you to do this morning. Is to just examine your own heart and say this to it, "Is that same sense of joy, that same sense of expectation, that same sense of longing that gripped me then after we had been apart for months still gripping me now?" Do we have that same hunger and thirst for righteousness? See, each week we come to God's word asking for the Spirit to change us and to fuel in us that hunger. And that should be our longing in this moment as we come to this text. Look with me at it here beginning in Colossians 3 in verse 7. Paul has this to say:

⁷In these (speaking of these sins), in these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another,

Let's pray right now.

Father, that's the desire of our hearts. To put these sins away. To fix our eyes on Jesus. And we're asking now in this moment as we turn our hearts to Your word that You would help us to do exactly that. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, as many of you know, in the month of May we had a focus on prayer. And one of the capstone experiences of that is a couple of weeks ago many of us stepped foot on Texas A&M's campus to do a prayer walk around the campus. We prayed for different places, we prayed for different purposes, but one of the things we did is we also prayed for different people. If we knew that there were Central members who work on staff or faculty at A&M, in some of these

different locations, we prayed specifically for them by name. Which is one of the reasons I was so encouraged over the weekend to get an e-mail from one of those staff members at, that's a Central member who works on A&M's campus, who shared with me the way that God used our prayer night to open a door for a spiritual conversation in their workplace. And so they sent this e-mail to me. It said something like this:

On the morning after the prayer walk, one of my colleagues asked to visit me. They do not have a church home and have become very hard-hearted over the years. Before I knew it I was sharing my testimony with them including my experience in our regeneration program. And they shared with me that they needed healing for some of the harms done to them in their past. Later on that week, they told me that they had planned to come to Regeneration. And I believe the opportunity to share with my colleague in such an open format was a direct result of the prayers prayed during the prayer walk the night before.

Isn't that amazing? To just see God's work through our prayers and then through the faithfulness of one of our members. And what this Central member that was sending me this e-mail is capturing through what they communicated is exactly what Paul is speaking of here this morning in our text. That when they spoke with this colleague, they were looking back on their past and they were looking ahead to their future. They were recalling what God saved them from and remembering what God saved them for. See, what Paul is driving at this morning is that we need to be sober minded about our past, but we need to be single minded about our path towards the future in putting away sin. And remember what's happening here in this text. It's mirroring the one we saw two weeks ago in the last time I was preaching through Colossians where he gives us an instruction, a command, last time it was put to death. This time it's to put these sins away. And then he gives us these lists of commands. Well, last time that was followed up by a focus on our future. This time that command and list of sins is preceded by a perspective of our past. And in each of these situations, Paul is calling us to fight sin in our life. To fight those battles by the Lord's strength. And he gives us a different set of sins to address. Remember last time it's those reprehensible sins that anyone can recognize. This morning it's often those respectable sins that we so often overlook. And here's what we're going to find this morning as we work our way through the text is that if we want to find lasting victory over sin, we need to remember both what is behind us and what is before us. We need to remember our past and our path ahead. So notice the way he begins here in verse 7. He talks first about how we need to fight sin by remembering our past. You remember two weeks ago he talked about how we fight sin by remembering our future. That the coming judgment of God, the accountability that we will have in the future changes how we live in the present. But he also reminds us is that if we know we will be held accountable in the future, it reshapes the way that we see our past. And he says, look back at the way you lived so that you can understand how God has changed you now. The sin that used to define you now defines you no more. Notice how he talks about it. At the start of the text there he says, in these you too once walked. He's writing to them in the original language in the plural form. He's speaking to the entire church at Colossae that's receiving this letter. And I can imagine that as they're sitting there reading it for the first time, eyes might have glanced up and looked around the room. And you can see people who have been rescued by Jesus from horrendous sins. They had watched their now brothers and sisters in Christ fleeing from God, living in a way that displeased them, this wasn't some abstract idea, this is something that has happened to them and to us. That these things are true of us as well. That we were

trapped by sin and yet God has set us free. He speaks here of this pattern of looking back in a way that calls us even today to be honest with our sins. To be transparent with one another. To be vulnerable about our past because in these sins, we too once walked.

You see that word walked, it's this idea of a pattern of life, these things that you consistently practice. You were walking away from God he says there, in your life. And he does that in a way that reminds us that the sins we see in the culture are not things we shake our heads at and say, "That could never be us." We recognize that apart from Jesus that once was us. That's who we were even though now it's not who we are. He says, you once walked in them when you were living in them. And the way this appears in the original language, this verb to live, signals that it's something that happened in the past, but it happened in an ongoing way. It wasn't something that occurred once and then you moved on from it, it defined who you were. You remember how he spoke about this reality back in Colossians 1:21. Look back at that part of your book. Here's what he says:

²¹And you who were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds.

Our sin didn't just define who we were, it defined what we did. We were walking in it. A while back Cami and I were visiting with a friend of ours who's a realtor. And he was taking a couple around to show them different houses in a community where they were about to purchase them. And they went back to a house for a second time to have another look because they liked it so much the first time. They were heading towards making an offer on it. This particular house, the people had already moved out. They had cleared out most of their stuff. But around the house, there were a few items that they had left behind including in one of the bedrooms, there were several stacks of plastic drawers that were sitting there right in the middle of the room. And as the couple was looking around, the realtor just couldn't help themselves. They wanted to know, what's in, what's in these. Why would they have left them behind? Let me tell you, I think that they wished they would have never opened it. Because when they pulled the drawer open, they didn't find some old clothes or some tools that they might need when they're heading out of the house. When they pulled open the drawer, they saw a nest of baby snakes. Apparently these people were growing baby snakes in their bedrooms. Would you buy that house after seeing that? I'm like, "OK, I'm done. I'm out of here." It doesn't matter how perfect this thing is, there's this idea of revulsion of serpents living in your home. When Paul speaks here of the way that sin was living in us, that's the spiritual picture he is giving. That Satan is at work in our life, drawing us towards sin. And these aren't sins we dabble in. These aren't sins that we do occasionally. It's not sins we struggle with. These are sins we've walked in. They're living in us. The serpents of sin have taken root in the homes of our hearts. They define who we were. And he says, "Don't forget that reality." That before Jesus that's who you were. And if you want to find lasting victory over sin, you need to remember how far gone you were so you can remember how near God has brought you. It's one of the reasons why a gift of God to each of us is the opportunity to share our testimony with others. That when we talk about how we were walking away from God and our sin, how we walked to God in salvation, how we walk with God in the Christian life. We are remembering and rehearsing these exact same realities that Paul speaks of here.

So I can't help but wonder, when's the last time you shared your spiritual story with somebody else. When you told them about the way that Jesus changed your life. You see, what's

happening here with what Paul is doing, it seems strange. Why would he call our attention back to the past? We've got people in our life who love to bring up our past. To rub our nose in it. To remind us of our failures and shortcomings. We've got a spiritual enemy in Satan, the accuser, who constantly brings up our past. Who points out our flaws, our failures, the way that we're never good enough. Is that what Paul is doing here? Is that the reason why he draws our attention to these things? No, in fact, the opposite is going on. He is saying here what he has said somewhere else, such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were set free by the blood of Jesus. And the way that we can consistently find victory over sin is by remembering how far God has already brought us. If he brought us from death to life, surely He can help us put to death the sin that we face. There are some sins that just seem insurmountable. They're so enjoyable. They're so hidden. They're so attractive. They feel so alive that sometimes we wonder, perhaps even you in the room or watching by video right now, think you will never be able to beat that sin. But what Paul is reminding us of here is that there is no sin that God cannot put to death. That even though it makes you feel alive, it is leading to a spiritual death and yet by looking to the Son, by clinging to the Spirit, God can set us free and make us alive in Christ Jesus. He says, fight sin by remembering your past. But notice the way the passage goes on. He speaks next about how we should fight sin. Not just by remembering our past, but remembering our path. Where we're going. Where we're headed and how He has called us to get here. So he says there in verse 8,

⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another,

So you see Paul drawing this deep contrast here. He talks about what you once walked like and then he uses this phrase, but now. This division, this separation, this transformation. He's saying, that's who you were, but now it's not who you are. A new fight requires a new path. If we want to find victory in this Christian life, we need to take a different way than the way that we were walking before we met Jesus. And that's what he is speaking of there when he says, but now. He is talking about that amazing reality of the way the gospel transforms us. That on the cross, Jesus takes our sin and He gives us His righteousness. Jesus takes our judgment and He gives us His Holy Spirit. He empowers us to walk in a way that pleases Him. He puts us on a path towards righteousness. And how does that path come about? Well he gives us the command, the instruction that places us on that path towards righteousness there when he says, you must put them all away. You see that word must. It's not optional. It's not when it's convenient. Not when you think about it. It is a daily crucifying of the flesh and its desires. That's why he says, put them away. It has this idea of getting rid of something, throwing it away, discarding it, letting it be no more. Here's maybe how to think of it. When I was growing up in the 80's and 90's, my dad had us moving about every couple of years with his job in the oil business. So we'd move to these new houses and my mom would want to decorate them and make them feel like a home for us which often meant she wanted to change what was on the walls. Well, that was back in the 80's and 90's and what was the thing to have on your walls back then? That wallpaper. And I remember as a young 8-year-old out in Midland when we moved out there, helping her strip the wallpaper in the kitchen. And this wallpaper must have been put down by the strongest adhesive in world history. Because as we stripped it, you'd get these little postage sized stamps one at a time. And as an 8-year-old I don't understand why this is necessary. I'm like, "Look, you don't need to do this. Let's just put the paint on top of it. We'll pretend like it was never there to begin with." We don't need to remove something in

order to replace it. We can just paper over it. We can put that paint on top of it and pretend as if nothing was ever there underneath it. Paul gives us the same type of warning in this passage when he calls us to put away sin. He can say the spiritual shortcoming we may be tempted to take is to just paper over the sin in our lives. Pretend as if it's not there. Not remove it before we replace it. But what he is showing us is that's not the path that Christ has called us on. That instead, we are instructed to put these things away. And what is it that he's calling us to put away? Well, when you look at the way he unpacks verses 8 and 9, he speaks here of two types of sin that we must put away if we want to fight sin by remembering our path. He speaks both of the sins of our minds and the sins of our mouth. He speaks of the sins of our wrath and the sins of our words. He talks here of the sins of our scorn and the sins of our statements. There are these two things going on here that move us beyond the way that verse 5 spoke about sins of desire now to speak about sins of demeanor. The way that we interact with others in how we see them and how we speak to them. The danger of these sins is they're respectable sins. Sometimes people don't even notice them. Sometimes you don't notice them. They're easy to justify and to rationalize. But if we want to walk in a manner worthy of God, we need to fight them just like we fight the sins he spoke of in verse 5. You remember back to that parable that Jesus told about the prodigal son. That younger brother goes off, he lives a life rejecting the way of his father in sin, celebrates it, lives it up, those significant and reprehensible sins. But when he comes home how does his older brother respond? Does he welcome him back with open arms? Is he so glad to have him in the family? No. He responds in anger. He responds in harsh words. Both the younger brother and the older brother were walking in sinful ways before their father, but just on different paths. Colossians 3:5 gives us those sins of our younger brother. But right here in Colossians 3:8 and 9, he gives us those older brother sins, the ones that seem more subtle. They seem more respectable but they are still displeasing to God and must be put to death.

And look at the way he speaks about those first three there: anger, wrath, and malice. Paul is calling us to fight against hard hearts that harbor hate, anger, wrath, malice. He's talking about the way that these sins can manifest themselves in our emotions and in our actions and our intentions. That we desire for wrath. We respond in anger. We become mad in a way that turns inward on ourselves. And what's fascinating about these words he uses here is you see that first one, anger. That's the exact same word that he used back in verse 6 to speak of the wrath of God in judgment. So what is right and good for God to display in future judgment is wrong and sinful for us to display towards others in our present realities. He's echoing the words of Jesus. Do you remember these back in the Sermon on the Mount? You'll see them on the screen in Matthew 5, verses 21 through 24 when he says:

²¹“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

As the words of Jesus echo around this room, I wonder this morning that because of your anger, your wrath, your malice, is there anyone in your life that you need to leave your gift at the altar

and go and be reconciled? To make things right with them, to confess the way that you have had a hard heart towards them that harbors hate. And there maybe some of you sitting here in the room this morning or watching online who say, "I'm not an angry person." And when you say that, you recognize, I'm not the type of guy or woman who burns white hot with rage. You know, there are some people around you that are like a volcano, the molten lava is always under the surface right there and then occasionally those outbursts of anger come and they spew forth in unmistakable ways. But that's not the only way that anger shows up. Anger doesn't just come in the form of white hot rage; it can also appear through the smoldering embers of ongoing resentment. Time's passed but you still can't get over it. You may look at them with a smile but you've got daggers in your heart. That, that passive aggressive demeanor towards them. That rejoicing in their failures or shortcomings. That too Paul is calling us to put to death. And how do we put those things away? How do we fight this battle on the path that Jesus has called us to? The way that we do it is to set our minds, not what others have done to us, but instead what Jesus has done for us. To remember no matter what ways we've been wronged, He has born far more. And He has walked faithfully. See, Paul is speaking here of the way that we need to resist and fight against hard hearts that harbor hate. But notice the way this passage goes on.

He also challenges us to fight against harsh tongues that devalue others. That's why he speaks there of slander, obscene talk from your mouth. And he says, "Do not lie to one another." In other words, we can devalue others with our words. And those harsh tongues devalue others in a number of ways, he's saying here. He says, sometimes we devalue others when we use words that destroy them. That's what he's speaking of here when he talks about slander and to rail against, to revile. It's when we turn our words into weapons. And as a matter of fact, in the original language, the word that makes into slander is the same word that is used for blasphemy. That when we speak and revile God, it's the same way as when we speak and revile against those made in the image of God. He warns us not to use our words as weapons and imbedded in this reality is a reminder that often harsh words come from hurt people. They seek to hide or cover or numb the pain in their own life by inflicting it on others. He says, do not slander. And then he uses this term to call us to not have obscene talk coming from our mouths. It's the only place in the New Testament where this appears. He's speaking about shameful words, foul words, filthy language. And there can be this temptation when nobody's around, nobody's paying attention, nobody's going to notice that we might speak differently than when we're being watched. But God is not mocked. He sees. He knows and He tells us that we should not degrade others through this obscene talk. And that's why he brings it to the culmination at the end of this passage by warning us of the way that our harsh words can devalue others when we use our words to deceive them. That's why he says there, do not lie to one another. You see, Paul has already condemned the lies of the false teachers. He's pointed out the way that they are leading others astray, but now he is turning his attention within the church itself. To show them that the same things they may be tempted to condemn in others may be the same reality in their own life. Is there any sin more damaging than deception? I mean, think about it. You go back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve, they hide from God. They lie about what they've done. When God gives us the 10 Commandments, one of them is, thou shall not bear false witness. When the people of God go into the promised land, they win that majestic victory at Jericho, one of them hides some of the loot in their bag and lies about its reality. And when they go to fight their next battle at Ai, they are defeated. The sin of lying brings destruction. Think about the people that have lied to you before. Or who you have lied to. That broken trust. That broken relationship. How difficult it is to see things rebuilt. And yet why is it so often so appealing to

lie to one another? Well we lie when we want to hide our flaws or hide our sins or perhaps to hide that we don't believe in the power of the truth. And in the church, as he says, do not lie to one another, he is speaking to the Colossians in the church. And so often this pull towards lying can show up in sophisticated ways, like through gossip and flattery. I like the way that one author puts it. He says that gossip is saying behind someone's back what you'd never say to their face. And flattery is saying something to their face that you'd never say behind their back. Those are twin dangers in the church. That we can be pulled towards lying. When Paul speaks here of fighting for our Christian life, fighting against sin by remembering the path that God called us to, he reminds us that as we seek to live out our faith, we may face resistance. So if we can just be honest with one another for a minute this morning, when you seek to serve, you will be slandered. Serve anyway. When you seek to lead, you will be lied about. Lead anyway. When you're in the battle, when you're that pilot flying into the mission and you start receiving enemy fire, incoming against you, that's not an indication that you're in the wrong spot, it's an indication you are right over the target. And when you are walking faithfully in your mission, you better believe that satan will send into your life the slander and the lies that will seek to lead you astray. And why would we be surprised by that? Think about our Lord Jesus Himself on the way to the cross. He is crucified after being mocked, after being slandered, after being lied to. How would the followers of Jesus expect any different? That's why Paul speaks here in this moment and he calls us to walk faithfully. And the way that he tells us to do it is to fight sin by remembering our past and remembering our path. Remembering what lies behind us and fixing our eyes on what lies before us. And that's why this text is so fitting as we turn our attention now to the Lord's table. Because Paul speaks here in this passage about what comes out of our hearts and out of our mouths. And now as we turn our attention to the table, we are reminded of who's come into our hearts when we put these elements in our mouths. You see, when we come to the Lord's Supper each month, we are not just hearing the gospel proclaimed, we are tasting it. That broken body, that shed blood. And that's why it's a family meal and we invite you to come if you've met Jesus. If you're walking with Him in salvation and obedience, this is a meal for you. That's why when the response song is playing, I'm going to invite you to these tables to come and get these elements, but as you do it to search your heart. To remember the words of Jesus, is there a brother or sister in your life with whom you are at odds that you need to be reconciled with. Is there a sin that needs to be confessed and crucified? Let us hear these words before we pray from the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 when he says this:

²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Let's pray together as we ready our hearts.

Father, in this moment would You lay our hearts open? Would You convict us of sin? Would You bring us to repentance? Would You help us to remember the ways that we once walked in rebellion against You so that You might renew us to walk faithfully on the path that You've called us to? I'm praying for brothers and sisters in the room right now, God. If they are heavy laden and weary that they will find rest for their souls in Jesus alone. And that You would take this bread and take this cup and use it as a way to nourish our hearts to walk faithfully with You. And we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.