



Sermon – May 23, 2021
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 3:5 – 6

Matthew 18:7 – 9

1 Corinthians 6:18 - 20

Let's open our Bibles together. We're going to spend our time in Colossians chapter 3 in verse 5. And as I mentioned during the welcome, we're going to be talking about some mature content related to sin involving physical intimacy. And I just want to acknowledge that because there may be parents and grandparents in the room that will want to think through if their children are ready for that conversation. But what we know is that when we come to God's word, God's word speaks to everything. That there is no area of our life that it does not shine the light of the gospel into our souls. And one of the places we see that show up is right here in verses 5 and 6. Because what Paul does in this particular passage is talk about two areas where so often the church seems out of step with the culture around us. It's in the areas of sex and hell. And that's what he's going to spend his time focusing our attention on this morning. And as this conversation unfolds, one of the things that I want you to recognize is that even though we feel as if we are often different than the culture when it comes to issues related to sexuality, what we need to recognize is that the truth is we're often a lot more similar than we want to admit.

There was a survey of Christians not long ago that came out with some startling statistics about our views of sexuality. They interviewed evangelical Christians and asked them whether or not certain things would be considered appropriate for two unmarried people to do. And what it said is that 36%, more than 1/3 of Christians said it was OK for two people in an uncommitted relationship to experience casual sex together. And then when you took it into a committed dating relationship, that number went from 36% to 46%. That sex outside of marriage was acceptable, not out in the culture, but right here in the church. What we're going to find this morning is that Paul is calling us to a different way. It'd be easy to avoid these types of topics in our Sunday sermons, but that's why we go verse by verse through the Bible. We don't avoid the hard stuff at Central. We take it head on in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ and I want you to see the way that Paul talks about it here beginning now in verse 5.

⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you; sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

Let's pray together.

Father, in the quietness of this moment, I pray that You would still our hearts, that the distractions around us would fade and that Jesus Christ, seated on the throne, would be highly exalted in this place. That Your Spirit would fill us in a way that convicts us of sin, sets us free from strongholds, and empowers us to live in a way that honors You. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, we all know it's graduation season and just a few weeks back, Cami and I went to an outdoor graduation party for some guys that were finishing at Texas A&M. And it had an incredible setup. As night fell, it had these stringed lights there, the amazing ambiance, the food was great, the company was great, you had everything you needed for an excellent outdoor graduation party except for one important thing. Nobody remembered the bug spray. And those lights that were shining in the midst of the darkness were like a beacon to every winged creature in the area. They were all around us. And the mosquitoes began to come as the other insects showed up at that time. And we spent the night enjoying fellowship, but also constantly having to slap or to rub or to move away. And so often in the Christian life, that's the way we think of temptation. Like that pesky mosquito that's hovering around us. Occasionally coming after us. Maybe sometimes we see it on us and we kill it quickly and move it away. That it's a nuisance to be endured. But Paul gives us a different picture this morning. That sin is not a nuisance to be endured, but an enemy to be destroyed. The way that we should think about temptations in our life are like spiritual terrorists who are relentlessly coming after us. It's like the Orcs in The Lord of the Rings. They're never ending, they're powerless, but they're relentless in their pursuit of us. They're always coming for us, pursuing, persuading, persisting. And the call that Paul is giving us this morning is to fight. And the foundation for that fight we have seen in the last few verses is the fact that we are hidden with Christ and God. We have been united to Jesus by faith. And that lays for us the spiritual foundation for the fight that Paul calls us to today.

See, what we're going to find as we work our way through this passage is that Paul is calling us to fight sin to the death. So notice how he begins in verse 5. He tells us first that we need to fight sin until it is put to death. That's why he says, put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you. That word therefore is tethering what he says in verse 5 back to what he's already said in verses 1 through 4. And what we have seen is that if we have died with Christ, we should now put sin to death in our life. In other words, if Jesus has died for us, then sin should die in us. That's the picture that he's giving. Some of the ways that you might hear this talked about commonly are to say things like, behave like you believe, become who you already are. At the core of these ideas, is that our union with Christ empowers our obedience to Christ. And what does that obedience look like? It tells us there that obedience in the Christian life is a call to fight until sin is put to death. That's why the beginning of verse 5 tells us, to put to death therefore what is earthly in you. That phrase, put to death, this is the only time it's used in this way in the New Testament to talk about the spiritual life of a believer. And the picture there is to kill, to mortify, to treat as dead. You get a little window into this, let's say somebody's at your house and they surprise you. They jump out and scare you and you're embarrassed by it and

you'll say to them, "You're dead to me." You don't mean it in the moment, maybe sometimes you do, but you normally don't mean it in the moment. But that idea of them being dead to you, like you don't want to have anything to do with them. You want to distance yourself. They are disconnected from you. That's the image here. That that's the relationship of what our lives should be like to sin. And I want you to see on the screens the way that Jesus speaks about this in Matthew 18 in a familiar passage in verses 7 to 9. He gives us a picture of what it looks like when He says this:

⁷"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! ⁸And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

Jesus is giving us this picture of doing whatever it takes to destroy sin in our lives. One of my college roommates, his parents came into town all the way down from Iowa back when I was in school. And I'll always remember that meal that we shared together. It's not because I remember how great the food was, or how nice the restaurant we were at, it's not just that I remember that I was a poor college student and they bought my dinner. Although I definitely remember that all these years later. What I remember when we sat down to that meal was watching his dad eat. And the reason it was so intriguing at that point is because his father only had one arm. And he used a special utensil that combined the functions of a knife and fork and with one hand he was able to both hold his food in place and slice it together. I had never seen anything like it. I had known his father's story, but I hadn't yet seen him putting these things into practice. You see, his dad is in the farming community there in Iowa. And in a tragic accident, the sleeve of his shirt got caught up in some farming equipment and sucked his entire arm into it. It was mangled, it was destroyed. But it wasn't just his arm that was at risk in that moment, it was his entire life. Because in less drastic action was taken to free him from what had happened to that one body part, the rest of him was in jeopardy. That's the type of picture that Jesus is giving here when he says, to chop off a hand, to chop off a foot, to gouge out an eye. He's saying, you need to be ready to do whatever it takes to follow Jesus, even if it means putting to death those things in your life that you enjoy but that may hold you back from fully following Him.

So what is it that we're called to put to death? He says there at the middle of verse 5, what is earthly in you. Or more literally in the original language, the members of your body that are on the earth. You see, he's picking up on language he's already used in verse 2 and he's personifying the sinful passions and practices of our lives and saying that these things need to be chopped off and put to death. But I don't know about you. When I worked my way through this passage this week, I'm reading through this and I'm thinking to myself, Paul sure sounds a lot like the false teachers that we've seen him condemning over the last few weeks. You know, they were talking about the pathway to God is through asceticism. It's through severity to the body. It's through what you put to death in your life physically that will earn your way to God. Doesn't that seem like what Paul is driving at here? Well, instead, there's a difference in motivation. That we don't put these things to death in order to earn our relationship with God, we put these things to death to express our relationship to God. To follow after Him, the type of

holiness that He calls us to. And the question each one of us needs to be wrestling with this morning is, what needs to be put to death in your life? Is there a place you need to escape? Is there a picture you need to delete? Is there a password you need to change? Is there a person you need to leave? Is there a pattern you need to abandon? In the quietness of your heart, you know right now where those strongholds in your life are. And what Paul is speaking to us here is that the way of the Christian life is one that by the power of the Spirit will do whatever it takes to crucify the flesh. That's why Paul speaks here about this idea of killing sin in our life. And I love the way one of the ancient puritans, John Owen, put this idea when he said, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." But notice here. Paul doesn't leave this at the abstract to put to death sin in general, he begins to speak specifically about sins in the second half of verse 5. And he talks about sins related to sexuality. You know, there are five different places in the New Testament where lists of sins like this are itemized out and basically every one of them sexual sin is first and foremost amongst what Paul addresses. Why is that? It's because of the pull, the power, and the prevalence of sexual sin. And if you think it's awkward to talk about sex on a Sunday morning, just remember, my kids and my parents and even my in-laws are sitting in here today. So however awkward you feel, think about me for a minute.

But the gospel goes everywhere. It addresses every issue. And what we find is that Paul speaks to the matters of our hearts when it comes to our sexuality. And he does it in two different ways. First, he begins by talking about how sexual sin can show up at the level of our actions or our deeds. If you see the first two words in that list, it is sexual immorality and impurity. So what is he speaking of there? That word, sexual immorality, comes from a word in the original language that we get our word today, pornography, from. It's an umbrella term that encapsulates any sexual expression outside the beautiful bonds of marriage where God intended it to be enjoyed. It talks to every facet of sexual temptation. It speaks to the student in the room who's enslaved to the images that come up on the screen. It speaks to the unmarried couple who's living together, who's enjoying all the benefits of marriage without the commitment. It speaks to the coworkers who are daytime friends and nighttime lovers. There is no piece of our sexual life that God doesn't care about. He speaks there at the level of our actions. He speaks of the way that we are called to crucify the things that would drive us away from God in fulfillment of our sexual desire. But he follows right after that by not just talking about immorality, but also impurity. If immorality speaks about our experience of sexual sin, then impurity speaks about the effects of sexual sin. That sense of shame, humiliation, helplessness. That sense of feeling trapped. I said, "I was never going back here before, and yet here I am again." That's the type of effect that he is capturing there when he speaks of this concept of impurity. The way one of my friends says it is that there is nothing that drives two people further apart than sinning together. There are deep effects of the sexual sin in our life.

Some of those effects are the result of things that we've done. The mistakes we've made. For others, it's the effects of things that have been done to you through abuse or in other ways. We all, who fall short of God's design in this way, through sexual sin, bear those types of scars. But lest we think it's only about what we do, you'll notice as the list of sins goes on, Paul shifts his attention from our actions to our affections. And from our deeds now to our desires. Where as he goes on, he speaks there of passion, evil desire, and greed or covetousness. This picture that Paul is laying out is that even those sexual desires, those passions, or more directly in the original language, that lust. When it finds its expression outside of God's design in the marriage bed, it is sinful desire. It is dishonoring to God. And that's so often the way that satan works in

this area of our life. He takes the good desires for sexual fulfillment that God gives to us and he pulls us towards satisfying them through forbidden fruits. That passion, that evil desire, it's all rooted there as the verse tells at the end in this concept of covetousness. And on first glance, maybe you had the same reaction that I did, that it seemed so strange that Paul spends four words talking about sexual sin and then the last one, covetousness or greed, talking about financial desire that's dishonoring to God. But maybe you forgot the way that the 10th commandment speaks about covetousness. It tells us, do not covet your neighbor's house. But it also says, do not covet your neighbor's wife. That that same longing, that same desire, that same envy and jealousy, to want what others have, doesn't just show up in a financial greed, but also can show up in a sexual covetousness. Where we long for those satisfactions that we try to define pleasure in outside of God's design for our life.

But notice how verse 5 finishes. Because what Paul shows us is there is something even deeper at the root of all of this. What is at the root of these sexual desires? He says, which is idolatry. Its sexual sin is no more than idol worship. It may not show up with carved images in stone or wood. The way it shows up is not on carved external images, but it's carved into the fabric of our flesh. Those longings, those desires, that the things that we want, even more than God, we think that we can find our satisfaction apart from God, even more than we can find it in God. That's at the heart of what idolatry is. And Paul is telling us here, we must put these things to death. That's why Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6, verses 18 through 20, that sexual sin isn't just physical, but spiritual. That it's not just an act of weakness, but an act of worship. Remember, he is speaking about the pull towards temple prostitution that was common in the culture around them in Corinth. And this is what he says in verse 18.

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Do you want to find lasting victory over sexual sin in your life? Paul is showing us what that looks like. He commands us to flee from sexual sin. And the reason we ought to flee from sexual sin is because we've been bought with a price. That our life is now not our own. That we have a heavenly Father and we have Jesus as Lord calling us to satisfy our desires in ways that are pleasing to God. But there is another weapon that Paul speaks of about what it looks like to find victory over sexual sin in our lives. It is hidden right there in plain sight back in Colossians 3:5. So if you look back there, when you see the phrase, put to death; in the original language that verb shows up not in the singular form addressing you as an individual Christian, it shows up in the plural form, addressing us as a community of believers. That one of the chief ways that Satan leads us astray in sexual sin is through isolation and then condemnation. He pulls us away from the people of God, he drives us into sin that turns us away from the heart of God, and he destroys our lives. And part of the gift that God has given us through the church is a people to come alongside one another if we're willing to open up our hearts to be honest about our sin, to seek help, to confess our sins to one another that we might be healed. He is telling us that this is a fight that we're called to do together. It's one of the reasons I'm so excited that at the end of this service, we're going to bring up a number of our leaders who have been preparing all year to help us launch starting this Fall, several discipleship enrichment programs. I'll talk more about them in just a minute. But one of those in particular is known as Regeneration. Regeneration is

a yearlong, Christ-centered discipleship and recovery program that equips you to recognize sin in your life, to put it to death, and to come alongside other believers who are seeking to do the same just as Paul is speaking of here. You see, what Paul is laying in front of us this morning is that each one of us is called to fight sin until it is put to death in our lives.

But that's not all he has to say with us today. Because what you're going to find is that as we go on into verse 6, he is next calling us to fight sin until you are put to death. That it's not enough to fight sin until it's put to death, we must continue to fight sin until we are put to death. In other words, it is a lifelong, relentless, persistent, unwavering pursuit of holiness that God calls us to. And you see that captured right there in verse 6 when he tells us:

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

You see, it was fairly typical in ancient literature during that time period for writers to include lists of vices or sins that they were addressing. And they would do that in order to challenge their readers towards moral improvement. But that's not all that's going on here in the New Testament. When Paul lays these things out, he does it here in a way he so often does it elsewhere in his letters. The list of sins that we need to put to death is immediately followed by a promise of a future judgment that is to come. That there is this connection between sin and accountability that shows up in the passage that reminds us of the way that we are called to fight sin until the day that we die. And there are several facets of this future judgment that we see right here in the text. You'll see at the start of verse 6 we see the accountability of future judgment. That's why he says, on account of these the wrath of God is coming. That phrase, on account, means that there will be a holding of responsibility, an accountability. Even if we don't see it in this age, there will be a judgment in the age to come. Couple of weeks ago I just finished enjoying some Blue Bell with my wife and I was scrolling through the news and what I found was something I hadn't seen. There was a stand-off in a suburban community between an off-duty police officer and someone's pet. Now this wasn't a tabby cat, it wasn't even a Great Dane, the reason that this garnered national news attention is because the pet that had gotten loose from its owner and was in the stand-off with this off-duty officer was a 9-month-old Bengal Tiger. It was bigger than him. And you could see video footage of it, of this tiger escaping from its house and it stalking around, it's coming up at this officer and then backing off. It's coming up and then backing off. Finally, the owner emerges from the house. Can you imagine that moment? Your wife looks at you and says, "Honey, I think the tiger got out." That's a bad day, right? You've got to go grab your tiger, he wrestled it back into his home, moments later he was seen rushing it to the back of its SUV, he put his tiger in his car, and sped away as the police went on a chase in order to find him. One of the police reports following that, it was discovered that this man was already in some trouble. You see, he was, he had been charged recently with a murder and he was out on bond from that, and harboring a tiger in city limits which is illegal in the city of Houston. And it caught everyone's attention because it doesn't seem right. It doesn't seem normal that this type of pet should be out. That this type of behavior should be going on. Once it was revealed, they did everything they could to conceal it, to hide, and to run from accountability.

Here's what I want to suggest to you this morning. There are so many times where we seek to do the same thing with the secret sin in our lives. We keep it behind closed doors. Nobody sees it. Nobody knows what's there. In those rare moments where we make a slip and it gets out, we

immediately try to hide it back in. We load it back into the car of our hearts. We seek to drive away from the accountability that's to come. We want to escape the judgment that will happen. But what Paul is showing to us this morning, is that the judgment is coming. And the judgment will come on the basis of the sins in our life. There is a certainty to that judgment. But he goes on to show there that there is also severity of that future judgment. That's why he speaks there of the wrath of God. Now what is this wrath of God? The easiest way to understand it is that it is God's righteous displeasure of our sins and His just judgment of sinners. His righteous displeasure with sin and His just judgment of sinners. And we see this wrath of God showing up throughout the entire sweep of Scripture. From Genesis after Adam and Even sinned, when they are cast out of the Garden, that is the wrath of God. When the floodwaters overtake the world because of sin. When Sodom and Gomorrah fall. When the exodus occurs with the plagues and the crashing of the waves. When the exile happens to the people of God. And all of those instances are shaping a pattern that finds its culmination on the cross. Where Jesus, the sinless One, comes. He dies in our place in order to bear the wrath of God. To receive the penalty that we deserve. The judgment that would be ours in the future, He now takes in the present so that we might be set free from it if we follow Him in salvation. There is this image there of the wrath of God that we find in the New Testament plays itself out for eternity in hell. What Scripture describes hell as is eternal conscious judgment. I don't know about you, but have you ever wondered to yourself, why do we have to spend eternity suffering for only decades worth of sin. Doesn't that seem like a sense of cosmic cruel and unusual punishment? God, that's enough. Why is this even necessary? To be this harsh for this long, that's the kind of question that might well up in our hearts. But here's what I want you to recognize. The reason that hell is eternal judgment is because in hell there is eternal sin. In other words, here's what I mean. Once we die and we are separated from God, as the Scripture tells us, we are given over fully to our sinful desires. It's not as if from that point forward we cease dishonoring God. Our sin remains, our sin continues, and thus does the judgment. The accountability that is happening there, there is a severity to this future judgment. And the incredible thing to us this morning should not be a disappointment that God would allow anyone to go to hell, but an amazement that a holy God would allow anyone into His presence. That's the grace of God. That's His mercy poured out for you and for me. And what Paul is showing us here is that as he brings this text to a close, as he tells that he doesn't just speak of the severity of this future judgment, but he also speaks of the imminence of this future judgment. That it is near. As he says there, the wrath of God is coming. It's in the present tense. It's not something that's out there in the future. It's on the way. We're getting the first taste of it even now. It's as if we're in the outer rain bands of that hurricane that's about to enter shore. The judgment is coming. The end is near. And what Paul is speaking of here when he pairs that call to fight sin with this reminder of future judgment, he is speaking here in a way that tells us that part of what God uses to help us resist sin in our lives is to remember our future. That the warnings that come press us on towards a holiness that can drive us towards fighting sin in our lives and drive us towards sharing the gospel with others. If we truly believe that sin separates us from God, if we truly believe sin, even sexual sin, is worthy of the judgment of God, and if we believe that that judgment is certain, it's severe, it's imminent, then that should call us to take the gospel to all people so that they might hear the life-saving message of Jesus.

Just a few weeks ago, right here on this stage, Jon and Laura Lee and their family stood right in front of us. If you remember it was a missionary commissioning, as we took these who grew up in our church and we're sending them to the nations to Oaxaca, Mexico. They've been there

now for about two weeks. And anytime you move into a new space, there's always some time that it takes to adjust, right? You've got to get used to the new culture. Oftentimes that's referred to as culture shock. Where you experience something that's so different than what you're used to that it shocks you, it surprises you, and it takes some time to adjust. One part of any good missionary training is they're going to train you not just in the language of the people, but the culture of the people. And the goal of that time of preparation is preparation for the purpose of immersion. To reduce the amount of culture shock so that the moment you arrive there, you understand the new normal and it reflects what you've been preparing for throughout this entire time before you arrive. The picture that Paul is offering us this morning is that Christ work in our life is preparation for heaven. That He is working in our lives now, moving us towards holiness, because as we become more like Jesus, it will reduce the culture shock of stepping into a place of total righteousness, total holiness, and the pathway to do that is to fight sin in our lives. Fight sin until its death. And fight sin until our death. That's the call of the gospel this morning.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to You, we're reminded in Your word of that way that You have set us free from sin. And I pray this morning that if there are people in bondage to sin today, whether in this room or watching on the screen right now, Lord, that You would set them free. That there would be a brokenness, Lord, that Your Spirit creates in their life a conviction of sin, a confession of unrighteousness, a repentance from the ways they've turned away from you, and a clinging to You, Jesus. Lord, I pray that You would tear down strongholds in this place and that You would empower us to fight the good fight of the faith by Your Spirit, God. That we would not grow weary in doing good, knowing that at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Lord, we wait in expectation for Your return. But as we wait, God, as we long, as we hunger for Your future return, let us walk in the manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.