



SESSION OBJECTIVE: COLOSSIANS 3:5-17

To understand the difference between ungodly and Godly characteristics.

Choose Some, Lose Some

For years now I have been interested in health and fitness. Apart from the surface level benefits, I find that my diet and activity have a profound effect on my ability to think deeply about spiritual things. Wholeness is emotional, spiritual, and to a great extent, physical as well. There was an exercise I learned a long time ago through a local organization called, “Choose One, Lose One.” The objective was to find one bad habit that you wanted to get rid of, and one good habit that you wanted to learn, and for the whole month make THOSE TWO things your focus. If you could master it, you would choose different ones the next month. If not, you stayed on those first two until you got it down. The concept was that by the end of the year, you would have learned several new healthy habits (sleep more, read ___ pages a day, drink more water, etc.) and also lose several habits (late night ice cream, burning both ends of the candle, etc.). It is a simply way of organizing the kind of change you desire, and then acting on it.

Colossians 3:5-17 is a kind of outline, as well. Paul discusses the parts of us, old habits if you will, that we were at one time in bondage to but now have the power through the Holy Spirit to be free of. He says, “Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you” (Col. 3:5). What do we replace those things with? He says in verse 12, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones,” and then lists several of the Godly characteristics that we should desire to walk in. Instead of a “Choose One, Lose One,” it’s more of a, “Choose Some, Lose Some.” This week, we will look through this list and unpack several of these in greater detail.

“Lose Some”

Colossians 3:5-11 detail the ungodly characteristics that we are to, “put to death.” The first list of characteristics (five total) is mentioned in verse 5, and the second list (also of five) is mentioned in verse 8. Below is breakdown of each list.

PERSONAL ACTIONS

The first list in verse 5 can be seen as a list of personal actions. Four of the five mentioned are almost always sexual in nature in Paul’s letter, and in the context the fifth make sense. “Sexual immorality” is used 25x in the Scriptures. It’s the Greek word πορνεία (porneia), the word from which we get our word, “pornographic.” It was traditionally translated as, “fornication,” and it refers to illicit sexual intercourse. It is often used synonymously with the word, “adultery,” however that word captures an act of sexual intercourse that breaks the covenant of marriage. Sexual immorality is any sexual act outside of the boundaries of marriage. Sex is a gift given to be experienced within the institution of marriage, the first institution ever created by God (Gen. 2:24-25). It is the will of God for people to abstain from sexual immorality (1 Th. 4:3).

“Impurity” typically refers to the spiritual uncleanness that is the result of sexual immorality. The acts of illicit sexual behavior mar the spiritual part of a man or woman. The next two typically go together: “passion” and “evil desire.” Sometimes also translated as, “lust,” passion is the fulfillment of bodily appetite in a misguided manner. The more one lusts, the more he/she gives into lust, the more the evil desire increases, and that only twists and perverts the lust into something worse. It spirals downward. A clear connection is found in Romans 1:24-26, where God gives them up to their lusts and it sparks their passions which dominate them.

The last word described is “covetousness,” which is then defined as idolatry. At first glance it seems out of place, since covetousness is not in and of itself a sexual sin. However, in the Ten Commandments (which were clearly on Paul’s mind here), the list of things in the Tenth Commandment that we are to not covet after include, “your neighbor’s wife” (Ex. 20:17). This brings the discussion of covetousness at least into the fold of sexual immorality to some degree. This in turn, Paul reasons, is actually a violation of the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). Thus, as stated above, sexual immorality is not just a sin that affects the transgressor, but is an actual affront to God Himself.

The idea in this first list of personal action is that the person engaging in these sins are thinking of themselves over anyone else, including Jesus. The desires of the flesh are elevated to a level above the throne of God. We are in submission then, to a false god (idolatry), which Paul says, “on account of these the wrath of God is coming” (Col. 3:6). They are expected in non-Christians, but they are not acceptable for those who have, “put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:10).

SOCIAL ATTITUDES

The second list of five are more social attitudes that affect not only the transgressor but the relationships of the transgressor as well. They also move from primarily action oriented to attitude oriented. The first on the list is, “anger,” and it refers to an inward state of displeasure, with a focus on emotion. It can also be directed towards a specific person or event. Then he includes, “wrath,” which is a stronger and more developed version of anger. It is a state of intense displeasure. Wrath develops when anger is left unchecked. Third is, “malice,” which is a state of wickedness or depravity. It is a total lacking of virtue. Fourth, he mentions, “slander.” Slander is the outworking of anger and wrath and malice towards another individual through speech. Slander is spoken against in several places in the New Testament, and has no place in the body of Christ. It should always be confronted and snuffed out. Last, he includes, “obscene talk.” This is the only time

this word is used in the New Testament, but classical sources shed some light on what this might be referencing. It is used for illicit story-telling, perhaps of recounting adulterous or provocative experiences. Aristotle uses it to mean derogatory speech about another person. Negative speech in the Bible is negative because of how it affects other people. In other words, obscene speech isn't merely "bad words," but on the contrary, speech that destroys relationships.

“Choose Some”

After discussing the ungodly actions and attitudes that Christians are to avoid, Paul moves to the positive attributes that we are to, “put on.” The speech here imagines these Godly attributes as clothing items that Christians choose to wear. The attributes listed are all bent towards unity in the church. First believers are to have, “compassionate hearts,” towards others in the body and outside of the body. Christians are to be marked by “humility,” meaning we treat others as more important than our selves. Paul mentions, “kindness, meekness, and patience,” all three of which are distinctly part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The command to be, “bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive,” should also be noted. The life of a Christian is lived in light of grace, the unmerited favor of God. Paul finishes in verse 14 with, “and above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Why is love the chief characteristic? Because it's the chief characteristic of God, for, “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8).

These attributes are meant solely for believers in Christ. Paul says we are to put these things on, “as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,” (Col. 3:12). How then, do we harness this Godliness? Paul gives some directives.

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

For one, we are to, “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful” (Col. 3:15). The peace of Christ, that which puts down sin and the flesh, is to be the governing authority in the heart of the Christian. How does one put away anger, malice, and wrath? How does one avoid slander? By being led by the peace of Jesus.

THE WORDS OF CHRIST

It is not just the peace of Christ that leads us, but His teaching. Paul says in verse 16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.” We direct our lives by the wisdom and counsel of Jesus' words, which are found in Holy Scripture. The study of God's Word is integral to putting on the things God desires for us, and putting to death the sinful tendencies we once surrendered to. We are to admonish one another by, “singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” The reference to psalms here is no doubt the psalms of the Old Testament. Hymns and spiritual songs would have been songs crafted for the purpose of praise that were more contemporary.

How can one know if the peace of Christ is ruling? By the level of gratitude one has. Paul says in verse 17, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Our lives, both in attitude and action, are marked chiefly by our gratitude towards God for what Jesus has done for us. How does the believer choose the Godly way and lose the ungodly tendencies? By direct obedience to both the, “peace which surpasses all understanding,” (Phil. 4:7), and the Words of Christ Himself in the Scripture.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Colossians 3:5-6. What is included in this first list of actions that we are to put to death? Write them each down and a brief description of each of them.

2. Read Colossians 3:7. What does it mean that we used to walk in the things we are to put away?

Day Two

1. Read Colossians 3:8. What is in this second list that Paul says we are to put away? Write each of them down and a brief description of each. What makes these different than the first list in verse 5?

2. Read Colossians 3:9-11. What does it mean that we have put off the old self and put on the new self?

Day Three

1. Read Colossians 3:12-14. Write down the positive, Godly attributes that we are to put on as God's chosen people. What do each of these mean? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read Colossians 3:15. What are we to let rule our hearts? Why? What does this mean?

Day Four

1. Read Colossians 3:16. What are we to let dwell within us? Why? What are we to do towards one another? How are we to admonish one another?

2. Read Colossians 3:17. To whom are we supposed to be grateful, and for what?

Week 10 Discussion: Following Jesus

Colossians 3:15-16 highlight an important priority for believers in Christ. We are to let the peace of Jesus rule our hearts, and the Words of Jesus dwell in us richly (or, abundantly). His peace refers to what He

accomplishes on the cross; sin is no longer a threat because it has been defeated. There is peace! The Words of Christ dwell in us when we take them in through the practice of Bible study. Talk as a group about these two edicts we are given, and how well you accomplish them.

1. Icebreaker: Which of these two (peace of Christ and Words of Christ) do you feel are your strength? Which is your weakness? Why?
2. Which of the negative things listed in verse 5 or 8 do you struggle with the most, and why? Which of these do you struggle with the least?
3. Which of the positive things listed in verses 12 through 14 do you struggle with the most, and why? Which of these are your strengths?
4. Would you describe yourself as a grateful person? Why or why not?
5. Would you describe yourself as a forgiving person? Why or why not?

Takeaways:

1. There are worldly, sinful attributes that we all walked in prior to faith in Christ, but that we are to now put to death.
2. Believers are to replace those worldly attitudes and actions with Godly attributes.