

Joshua 11:21-23 (Opening)

²¹ And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. ²² There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain. ²³ So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

We had a work day here yesterday. We did some “house cleaning” that needed to be done.

I’m not really good at going through things and clearing old things out; I’m a bit of a packrat. OK, maybe a bit is an understatement. But I’m not a hoarder. I’m not that bad yet.

I know how you need to be to clear through old stuff; you need to be ruthless. If it hasn’t been used in a few years, it probably won’t be used, and you just need to get rid of it. Some things make sense to save; unused flooring, hardware, things that can be used to replace or repair what you’ve got. But some things just need to go, and that’s what we did yesterday.

I think we were pretty ruthless. We got rid of a lot of things that were just sitting around in a corner of the basement here at the building, collecting dust. Just because we got rid of things doesn’t mean we threw them away; some things were in great shape and people decided they wanted to take them home; some things that no one wanted we sent to Goodwill. Some things we saved for Bob’s yard sale.

Becoming a Christian is even more ruthless than cleaning house. It’s RADICAL house cleaning. It’s more than radical house cleaning, it’s a war -- it’s kill or be killed.

Let me see if I can explain what I’m talking about. To fight this war of becoming a Christian, first you need to decide it’s a war you’re actually going to fight; it’s not something you can do half-way. If you decide to become a Christian, you can’t just be one partially; you can’t just dip your toe in the water, or just a leg or an arm. You have to go all the way into the water. No turning back either. You need to commit to the whole decision and clean up all the old garbage in the house.

Let’s see how Paul puts it in Colossians 3:5-11.

Colossians 3:5-11

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Paul says it's kill or be killed. These first five sins that Paul talks about he says are why the wrath of God is coming. He doesn't say the wrath of God **MAY** be coming; Paul's very definite on this; it **is** coming, and these sins are part of the reason.

Paul says something similar to the Romans in Romans 8:13, but a little less specific.

Romans 8:13

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

So, let's take a closer look at the first five sins or vices that Paul talks about in Colossians 3:5. Before we start digging in to them, it's interesting to note that Paul lists two groups of five sins. The first group of sins he says the Colossians have overcome, but the second group of sins they still need to work on. Then he lists one big sin they need to work on, too. So, let's look at the first five.

Paul's Roster of vice – the first five

First, we have sexual immorality – the Greek word is πορνεία porneia /por·ni·ah/. It's a surprisingly difficult word to define, really, since its definition expanded over a 1200 year timeframe. The root of the word is the verb πορνεύω, porneuo /porn·yoo·o/, which means to prostitute oneself. Once the Jews and early Christians came on the scene, the word was transformed to any form of sexual activity that was not allowed by God's law.

Next, we have Impurity or ἀκαθαρσία [akatharsia /ak·ath·ar·see·ah/] in Greek. The prefix a- negates the word that follows it, and katharsia or catharsis (in English) means cleaned or cleansed. So it literally means not clean or uncleanness.

The next vice is Passion. The Greek word is πάθος [pathos /path·os/]. Pathos is uncontrolled and habitual lust. It's something you are drawn to and you just can't stop yourself. You feel the need to keep doing it.

Next, we have evil desire – κακός ἐπιθυμία [kakos epithumia / kak·os ep·ee·thoo·mee·ah/]. Kakos means evil. A better translation of epithumia may be craving or longing. When these cravings or longings go unchecked, a passion for what is forbidden arises.

Last, we have Covetousness – πλεονεξία [pleonexia /pleh·on·ex·ee·ah/]. That's one of those words you don't really hear outside of church. Covetousness is a greedy desire to have more. More what? Anything.

Now let's take a look at all the whole list. Paul says these five sins seem to be more of what non-Christians are "into". These are not typically things we see Christians doing, and Paul tells the Colossians that they **used** to do them, but now, they don't.

To me, this list looks like it's written in the opposite order of how it happens in life. First you start with a greedy desire to have more; this leads to evil cravings or longings; those evil cravings lead to passions (bad ones), which leads to impurity and ultimately to sexual immorality. Paul says the Colossians used to be like this, but since they became

Christians, they stopped this behavior. But they still have work to do. They've killed these enemies; but now they need to move on to the next objective.

Paul's Roster of vice – the second five

In verse 8, Paul moves on to the areas they need to keep working on; the next enemies to take out. Some of these at first glance seem a lot alike, but as we look deeper at them, we can see the differences. And while the first list are typically sins that non-Christians are more likely to commit, this list is where most Christians tend to fail.

First, we have anger. The Greek word here is ὀργή [orge /or·**gay**/]. Ironically, this is the same Greek word that is translated as wath in verse 6, talking about the wrath of God. Anger is the slow and gradual rising of emotion which increases to a white heat like a roaring furnace. It's long lasting and stays even after it comes out.

Next, is wrath, θυμός [thumos /thoo·mos/] in the Greek. This wrath, unlike orgay or what we translated as anger before, is a sudden and passionate outburst which boils up quickly and disappears as quickly as it appears. Strong's Concordance compares it to "inflaming wine (which either drives the drinker mad or kills him with its strength)".

The next sin that the Christians in Colossae had to keep working on was malice. Malice is an intention or desire to do evil; an ill will. If you have malice, you really want to hurt someone. Now, it may not be something that's always there, but it can rise up and take over, and then you do something you regret.

The fourth sin in this second group of five sins Paul lists is slander. This is actually a translation of the Greek word used, but if Paul were talking about slander toward God, it would have been transliterated from the Greek word to blasphemy. The Greek word is βλασφημία [blasphemia /blas·fay·**me**·ah/], and applies to slander of anyone, human or God.

The last sin in this group of five is obscene talk from your mouth. I think this one is self-explanatory. The guideline I was always told was if you wouldn't say it in front of your mother or your kids, don't say it.

Paul tells the Colossians they still need to get rid of these problems; these sins are still plaguing them. But as they say in TV commercials, "But wait! There's more!"

Paul's Focus – lying

In verse 9, Paul tells them to stop lying to each other. Is lying really still a problem? Evidently the Christians in Colossae still had a problem with it. But let's look at what this lying could be talking about.

I've been told that the best way to lie is to not tell the whole truth. Well, I guess saying "best" and "lie" in the same sentence probably isn't that good. Let's say the most effective way to lie is to conceal part of the truth. But why do we lie? We lie to protect ourselves or others, right? I mean, is there a correct answer to "Does this dress make me look fat?" If you're a man and your wife asks you that question, what do you say?

No matter how you look at it, even if you're trying to protect someone, lying is wrong. If you need to lie to protect someone, maybe there's some other problem that's causing the need for protection? Just a thought.

But why does Paul tell them they need to stop lying? Well, Jesus, in John 8:44, says that the devil is the father of lies, and that when he lies he speaks his native language. If we're Christians, we shouldn't act like the devil, so we should not lie. Also, Paul points out here in the last half of verse 9 and in verse 10 that we have, in a sense, changed clothes. When we became Christians we took off the old self and put on a new self. It was a complete, instantaneous thing. Putting off the old self isn't some gradual process. What's the point of putting on a brand new suit

if you're going to wear the same old coffee stained tie that looks so ratty and horrendous? You don't keep any of the old self, so why keep the actions of the old self?

In the last part of verse 10, Paul says the new self is constantly being renewed in the image of God. In other words, we're going to make mistakes; we're going to spill coffee on our brand new tie or it's going to get caught on something and get a little worn out. But that's what it's all about; learning by practice; working toward maturity in Christ by working to not do what we used to do as we grow in Him each day. Christ is the very image of God, if you remember from Colossians 1:15; the icon of God; our earthly representation of our creator. Here in chapter 3:10 Paul says that we're being renewed, and moving toward being more like Christ, being the image of God. We're not there, and we won't be there until we get to heaven, but we're told to keep working toward it.

Verse 11 of chapter 3 talks about how relationships should be in the family of Christ. Paul says there's no Greek or Jew – in other words, there's no ethnicity. He says there's no circumcised or uncircumcised – we don't care what your religious background is. He says there's no barbarian or Scythian. Let me stop here and give a little context to these words, because I didn't know the background of these terms, and it helped me understand better.

The Greeks considered themselves to be very civilized. Anyone who wasn't a Greek was a barbarian. It was someone who didn't know how to speak Greek, or had rude, uncivilized behavior. Scythians were a particularly heinous group of barbarians. The Scythians were a nomadic people who lived on the north side of the Black Sea, and ranging all across the high steeps of Russia, including, if you're good with modern geography, what I call the "stans": Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. They were ruthless warriors and "didn't play

well with others” on the global playground. Some of them still don’t today.

Paul says there’s no barbarian or Scythian in Christ. Even if you were once considered in that group, you are now accepted in society, where these two groups were not (one more unaccepted than the other). There are no longer any more cultural differences.

The last part of the relationship aspect Paul addresses is social status. The comparison Paul uses is slave or free. We could say something different; poor or rich; homeless or have a place to live; jobless or employed.

Paul uses these contrasting terms to make the point that if we are in Christ, these differences don’t matter. We shouldn’t distinguish between our differences; we’re all the same in Christ.

This week, we only looked at seven verses from chapter three of Colossians, and we focused on the negative aspects of behavior; what the Colossians were like before they were Christians, and some of that they need to really work on now that they are Christians. But just because you cleaned up your act, because you stopped the bad behavior, doesn’t mean you’re done. That’s the first part of growing as a Christian. That’s the dirty clothes we take off when we become a Christian.

Next week, we’re going to look at what Paul says the clean clothes looks like; the clothes we put on, the suit that’s renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Luke 11:24-26 (Closing)

²⁴ “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ ²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.”