

Colossians 3:5-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-3/colossians-35-8/>

Paul continues to delineate between things above and things below, listing problematic indications of the latter.

This section, like the one preceding it, begins with the conjunction *therefore*. Paul is stringing together a set of arguments, building point upon point. In the last section ([see commentary for Colossians 3:1-4](#)), Paul implores the believers to remember that they have been raised with Christ and to think on the things of Christ (above) rather than earthly things (below). As believers, we get the joy of sharing in His Kingdom (above), along with the responsibility of sharing in His suffering, while we live out our physical existence here (below). Our lives are kept (held, if you will) in Christ. By living according to the things of Christ (above) we bring the principles of the Kingdom (above) to the current world (below).

This is a summation of the first four verses of the chapter. The *therefore* now comes in—since we belong to Christ and are partnered in His glory, the following makes logical sense.

In this section, the logical progression of Colossians 3 suggests we ought to *consider the members of our earthly body as dead*. This phrase begins with a Greek word that is translated here as *consider dead*. The word is “nekroo.” It literally means “mortify” or “put to death.” The *members of your earthly body* are literally your limbs—arms, legs. Our physical pieces. What Paul is suggesting is that the Colossians ought to ensure that their physical behavior matches the spiritual reality laid out in verses 1-4 of Chapter 3. This is putting aside physical attributes like appetites and ego (below) and instead choosing to walk in spiritual attributes like truth and love (above).

Paul is NOT advocating for nullifying everything about the human body. The physical form (*the members of your earthly body*) is a wonderful thing; it is a manifestation of God’s creative power. What Paul is suggesting is that the choices we make in our physical existence should be in alignment with the spiritual, the things above. In fact, this is the way to gain the greatest benefit and joy from our physical existence—to set aside the things below and instead reach for the things above.

Importantly, there are specific things we are to put to death—*consider the members of your earthly body as dead to...*

Paul names what our bodies are to die to, namely, the things that are not of Christ. These are lowly things that lead to death, or separation. They separate us from our high calling (above) to live as God designed us to live, and thus be fulfilled. These things that are below, things we are to make the choice to die to (refuse to respond to), are all choices the world promises will lead to happiness, but which actually lead to self-destruction.

First in the list is *immorality*. The Greek word here is “porneia,” from which we get the term “pornography.” It is often translated as “fornication.” The Colossians would have understood this to include things like incest, promiscuity, sexual perversion such as adultery, sex with animals—any sort of sex outside of God’s design for biblical marriage. It is utilizing the physical body in an inappropriate way in order to satisfy an appetite. When we follow appetites, they become our master, and we lose our true selves. Such slavery to appetites leads to addiction. We are rather to master the appetite and not allow it to rule over us.

Next on the list is *impurity*. The Greek word here is “akatharsia.” It means “that which is unclean.” These are the things that harm us and cause us to operate counter to our optimal condition—consider what happens when we drink unclean water or eat spoiled food. This would include anything that we allow to become a mindset, a perspective, that prioritizes things below over the things that are above. The things below are like spoiled food and unclean water—they lead to sickness of our souls and loss of life.

It might surprise some that *passion* is on the list of things we should put to death. The Greek word “pathos” translated here as *passion* might better be translated as “affections”—specifically inordinate affections. Appetites. It is not talking about the deep passion and true desires of our heart, mind, and soul, such as the longing to be accepted and approved. It is talking about physical appetites and feelings/emotions. Our emotions might hint that “I am being cheated by the entire world” and suggest we begin to retaliate against everyone. That is inevitably 1) untrue and 2) unhelpful. Rather than be ruled by *passion*, we are much better served to see reality as it is (truth) and act in a way that benefits others in the community in which we dwell (love).

Fourth on the list is *evil desires*. This refers to things that are just wrong, perversions of the truth. Unreality. The Greek word for *desires* here is “epithymia.” It means “craving,” like an addiction. To long for, yearn for, things that are not true is foolishness and destructive to both body and soul. Addiction is a form of slavery that we choose. When we are slaves, we lose ourselves.

Last on Paul’s list (at least this one) is *greed*. Some translations choose the word “covetousness” here. The Greek word “pleonexia” is about wanting ore, from which we gain precious metals like gold. We often associate covetousness with wanting what others have. And greed as wanting more, and more, and more. They both, in the end, amount to the same thing: defining happiness as “acquiring what I do not have.” Choosing this perspective ensures misery, for, logically, one can never be happy if happiness only rests in acquiring what is not already possessed.

A lack of contentment leads to unhappiness. We might long for more of what we already have, discontent by degree. Or we could want what someone else has, a discontent by comparison to others. In the end, it is the same poison—a self-defeating, deceptive philosophy that “I will be happy with more.” The antidote for this is gratitude. Gratitude allows us to enjoy the things we actually possess.

Paul gives *greed* a special descriptive clause. He describes *greed* as something *which amounts to idolatry*. The word for *which* here is singular (rather than plural), so Paul is not talking about the entire list when he uses this phrase. He is talking specifically about *greed*.

Why is *greed* considered *idolatry*? Well, remember this entire list is about putting to death the things in the body that are not in alignment with Paul's assertions in verses 1-4. In those verses, Paul reminds the Colossians that they "have been raised with Christ" (above). *Greedy* is about seeking what we perceive we are lacking (which is always something when we choose this perspective, never nothing, thereby ensuring we are always unhappy).

But Paul's point is that we are lacking nothing because we have been grafted into the Kingdom through Christ. And Christ owns everything. To put it another way: Christ is inviting us to steward what has been gifted us—which is everything we need pertaining to life (2 Peter 1:3). When we start to think we do not have enough, we are basically putting our hope and our trust in that "something else" rather than who Christ is, what He has done for us, and what He has promised. Therefore, the "something else" is an idol; we are trusting in it rather than Christ.

Paul then warns, *it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come on the sons of disobedience*. This is how reality works: there are consequences for our choices. And when someone decides to follow in the ways of wickedness, it leads to evil—which is death. Death is separation; in this case when we follow these lusts, we are separated from experiencing the supernatural life gifted us by Christ.

When believers choose to follow the ways of evil, they become the *sons of disobedience* because the way of God is the good and proper way. When we do, say, and perceive counter to the truth of God, we act in *disobedience*. The consequence, or inheritance, of evil is destruction. Death. *Wrath*. *Disobedience* is separation from God. So is *wrath*.

The word for *wrath* has a root meaning of *intense emotion*. There is an implication of punishment in our modern mind, but perhaps the word is better thought of as a great and terrible sorrow. God gives the disobedient what they want, He allows them to have what they are seeking, because He refuses to override free will. This intense and violent sorrow is more like God watching people destroy themselves than Him angrily smiting them.

So much of Paul's writing is about alignment and that is certainly the case here. If you have been raised with Christ, Paul says, think about the things above (3:1), and *put to death* the things that are *evil* (3:5). This is an exercise of alignment, developing consistency in one's life.

Paul states overtly in his letter to the Romans that God's wrath is executed on anyone who walks in disobedience by a particular means—God gives them over as slaves to their own appetites (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). It is sad to consider that those who have been delivered from the base things of the world (below), including slavery and addiction, would choose death over life.

But such is the power God has granted humans—to make choices. It is the ability to make decisions apart from our emotions and appetites that makes us human, made in the image of God. Paul here is exhorting his children in the faith to make good choices. In doing so they are choosing a path to be fully human—to fulfill God's design.

If we believe and do evil, negative consequences will align with negative action. If we believe and do good, positive consequences will align. In order to do good, and have positive

consequences, we must seek things that are above. The things of Christ. If we seek the things that are below, we will gain the negative effects of the things below. The things below always promise life and deliver death.

Paul reminds the Colossians, *in them* (the ways of disobedience) *you also once walked, when you were living in them*. Before the knowledge of Christ became apparent to the Colossians ([see commentary on Chapter 1](#)), they thought and acted in these fleshly ways. “You’ve been here before,” Paul seems to be saying. It is like reminding a person who used to walk in a dark room, but has since found the light switch and flipped it on, how difficult it was to be in the dark. Do the Colossians really want to go back? This infers that they did indeed experience the negative consequences of fleshly living. But it is easy to forget pain after time has passed.

This is, in essence, a reminder of how far the Colossians have come. The undertone is shouting, “You’ve been set free!” Do not regress.

Not only should they avoid going back, they should avoid standing still: *But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth*. Paul seems to be saying, “You have come far in your understanding and action, but there is further to go.” The work is not done. There is more to steward. And the time for action is *now*.

The word for *now* is the Greek word “nyini.” It means “at this very moment.” So, right now. As this is being read. Today. Do the following. The only time we can act is in the present. We cannot alter the past. The future does not exist. We can only act *now*. The first action is an active putting *aside* of all these fleshly lusts.

Put them all aside, Paul says. The Greek word for *put aside* is “apotithemi.” It is different than the word (“nekroo”) in verse 5 that means “put to death.” “Apotithemi” means to “*put off or cast away*.” To lay something *aside*. The distinction is important. The first list (the sins to mortify—or kill) seem to be things Paul wants the Colossians to cut themselves off from. Build a barrier. Don’t let them in. Destroy them; put them to death. Death is a separation. So, separate yourself from these things.

But this list he does not ask for believers to put *them all* to death, only to *put them all aside*. This is probably an acknowledgment that the following list consists of things that you cannot eliminate completely. They will show up, and need to be put aside over and over. Some things you can learn to condition yourself away from—like the idolatries of the first list. But some things are human nature, part and parcel of our imperfect state. The task with these latter things is not to destroy them (an impossibility) but to decide in the moment they arise what to do with them.

So, Paul is suggesting that when the following show up in your life, cast *them all aside*. Push them off the board. All of them. Don’t make any exceptions. They are all by-products of the same rot. You won’t be able to prevent finding these in your hand at some point. But when you do, firmly and intentionally set them aside.

The first of these things to be cast *aside* is *anger*. Interestingly, this is the Greek word “orge,” the same word translated *wrath* in the phrase *God’s wrath* just a sentence before. If you remember, it means “intense emotion.” So, apparently, God feels this and it is aimed at the sons of disobedience. But it is not something for us to hold on to or act upon once we feel it. We are not asked to deny our emotions. We are asked not to be ruled by them.

To set aside emotion is to 1) acknowledge the emotion, and 2) to choose to make a decision apart from the emotion. A practical way to implement this idea is to “LIDD” emotions:

- Listen to emotions (hear them, understand they are telling you, “something needs to be done”)
- Investigate (rather than acting out based on the emotion, use your intellect and values to consider an appropriate action, an action rooted in the things above)
- Decide (make a choice based on values from above, and implement that choice)
- Dismiss (set the emotion aside, and thank it for doing its job, but dismiss it from suggesting actions)

To hold onto *anger* (or *wrath*) or to act based on a suggestion made by *anger* is to be ruled by emotions or feelings. God desires that we be ruled by choosing to do what is right and true (Philippians 4:8). We have the ability to choose, and that means we can feel emotions and still set them aside and make choices based on values. We can trust in God, and make choices to effectively steward what He has entrusted us to steward.

To add to the interest here, the second word on the list is translated *wrath*. It is the Greek word “thymos.” It is like a boiling anger. A passion that is out of control and oversteps its bounds. Again, this usually arrives as a hint at some injustice. Which is not in and of itself a bad thing. But when it arrives, we ought to be informed (Listen), understand what is true and right (Investigate), trust that God’s ways are best, and make a choice to act in His ways (Decide) then lay down the emotion, cast it aside (Dismiss). If this indignation is over something we can do something about, then we can do that. But ultimately, we can make a choice to trust God as the Judge (Matthew 7:1-2).

Next on the list is *malice*. *Malice* is the desire to cause injury, to harm others. It is to adopt ill-will. This is something like *anger* and *wrath*, that Paul implores the Colossians to release and lay aside. We might feel the emotion. We can then LIDD (listen, investigate, decide, dismiss) according to what is above, the things of the Kingdom, of truth and of love. We can acknowledge without being a slave to our emotions.

The Greek word for *slander* is “blasphemia,” from which we get the word “blasphemy.” It is, essentially, about speaking falsehood. Proclaiming untruth. It is often difficult to discern what is true and what is not. When we discover that we are thinking or communicating untruly, we must lay it down. Set it aside, and seek what is true.

The last item on the list is *abusive speech from your mouth*. This is the only place in Scripture where the Greek word for *abusive speech* appears: “aischrologia.” The condition, *from your mouth*, is another reminder that these thoughts might come in, the ideas or feelings might arrive,

but it is what we do with them that counts. We cannot always control what thoughts come into our minds. But we can control what we dwell on and what we speak.

Abusive speech, like the others, is something that ought to be *cast away*. It is not in alignment with the truth of the Kingdom of Heaven (the “things above”). Avoiding *abusive speech* is a good rationale for having an intentionality of avoiding denigrating language (below), and pursuing language that elevates (above). For example, the origin of cursing is to wish harm upon others. So it is worth considering the rationale behind what we say. As Jesus stated, “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). It is better to bless than to curse.

Biblical Text

⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.