

## Complete: Out with the Old – Colossians 3:5-11

One of my favorite books of all time is called *Educated* by a woman named Tara Westover. Tara was raised in rural Idaho on the side of a mountain in a survivalist Mormon family. They lived completely disconnected from nearly all of society and her father essentially only exposed his kids to his twisted version of reality. Tara didn't have a birth certificate until she was 9, never went to a doctor, and wasn't aware of much of anything outside of family life and the Mormon religion. She received little to no education while growing up. She didn't even know what the Holocaust was until her late teen years.

Today Tara holds a PhD from Cambridge University and is an award winning and best-selling author. The book tells her life story and it's obvious that her former life and current life and beliefs couldn't be more different. When I first heard the broad outline of her story, I asked the question some of you are probably asking now, how did she get from there to here? What events unfolded in her life? What brought about the change? I won't ruin the book for you because it's worth reading, but I mention her story to you because I want you to think about the two extremely different parts of her life.

Probably no one here has an old life and a new life that are that distinct, but nearly everyone has experienced significant change through life. Maybe you live somewhere you didn't expect, have a different job, or have experienced something challenging like divorce, a serious illness or the loss of a loved one. All of those events can change the course of your life, but none of them can alter who you are on the inside.

As you read the New Testament, it becomes clear that every human being needs a significant life change at the heart level. But this isn't a life change we can bring upon ourselves. We are born into a way of life defined by sin, and we can't just decide one day that we want to change course. God has to intervene. Listen to Colossians 2:13. This is what the Bible calls conversion, being born again, or being saved. It's a moment in time when God opens our eyes to our sin and the incredibly gracious sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

The Bible tells us about this event repeatedly and with many different terms. But one of the things we find out is that when God intervenes and you go from spiritual death to spiritual life, it changes everything about your life. You simply cannot remain the same person. It changes you to the core of who you are.

Paul has spent the first two chapters of Colossians exposing false teaching and pointing us to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for all our spiritual needs. He's been describing how we need Jesus and need to be connected to Jesus and how when we are connected to Jesus, we will have all we need.

Now, he's going to transition his argument in the letter and say, ok, if you are truly spiritually alive and in Jesus Christ, it **MUST** change the way you live day by day. And the first functional change Jesus will bring to your life is that you will no longer live like you used to. If you have a PhD from Cambridge, you won't go back and live like you did in Idaho. You won't go back to the old ways of life. In fact, you will put them to death. So, in Colossians 3:5-11 today we will see **2 Ways to Put the Old Life Behind You.**

### **1. Expel the Earthly (vv. 5-9a)**

As we start in verse 5 I want you to notice how Paul's commands here come because of what we saw last week about our new life location in Christ. Look at this first phrase of verse 5. Last week we saw that you can either live as a citizen of earth or as a citizen of heaven. Location matters and if you are in Christ you have died to this world. Look back up to 2:20 and 3:1-3.

And now Paul says, therefore, put to death what is earthly in you. Because you live with Christ in heaven, that which defines temporary earthly life and is characteristic of the old way of life must be put to death. This is a rather graphic picture so why "put to death"? Violent, intense and extreme effort to destroy the impact of sin. If you had a tumor that was contained but you knew would spread if left alone, what would you do? If the surgeon said the surgery will be difficult and the recovery will be long and painful. But you will be whole. Cut the old way of life out!

But notice the other command Paul gives here at the beginning of verse 8 that says the same thing but with a different metaphor. Sometimes this word is used to describe taking off clothes, especially stained and soiled clothes. I enjoy running and I am currently working back up toward running longer amounts on the weekends. I love long runs, but it would be a crime against those who live in my house to keep those clothes on for the rest of the day. They aren't giving off a pleasant aroma. I must remove them and then we'll talk about the obvious next steps later today and next week, but I must cleanse myself and put on new clothes.

So, we are to put to death the old way of life and to remove it from us like nasty clothes. But what specifically is the old way of life? Notice in verse 5 and in verses 8-9a we have two lists. These are lists of vices and Paul is known for listing out vices and virtues. The virtues will come in verses 12-17, but first we must put to death and remove the vices. Let me read the lists.

The first list begins with sexual sins. Anything outside of God's design for sexuality is what Paul describes here. God's design is that sex is a gift from God for one man and one woman inside the marriage covenant. But this list also contains several words that describe desires that have been twisted or bent out of shape by sin and this includes covetousness. It's possible to desire the wrong thing or desire the right thing at the wrong time or in the wrong amount. Any desire that has been distorted by sin ends up being idolatrous. In other words, sinful desires tend to become objects of worship for us and we exalt them above our desire for the one true God.

Look with me at the second list. All of these have to do with our relationships with others, particularly others within the church. The old way of life was defined by these interpersonal vices. Anger. Malice or a mean spirit. Ill will toward another. Slander. The defaming or reviling of another person's reputation. Abusive speech and lying. These are the sins that cause disunity and division within the body of Christ.

And so, Paul commands that because of our new life in Christ we kill off these patterns of sin and he provides additional motivation to help us in verses 6-7.

God's wrath toward sin is a necessary part of His character. He would not be a God of love if He didn't hate what spoils love and sin stains, twists, and ruins love. Therefore, God hates it and His judgment will come on those who give themselves to this way of life. And this was true of all of us according to verse 7. But notice the beginning of verse 8. But now. Things have changed for you if you are in Christ. You expel what is earthly out of love for God and others and because you have been changed. And this change of identity is the second way to put the old life behind you.

## **2. Embrace Your Identity (v. 9b-11)**

As we continue reading in verses 9-10 we get the underlying reason for expelling what is earthly in us and putting these sins to death. Look there with me.

It's vital that you see the language here. Paul is saying that you have already put off the old self and have put on the new self. This is a transition from death to life. It's what Paul has been talking about throughout Colossians. You died and have been raised with Christ. This happens when you see your sin as making you guilty before the one true and holy God. You see how He created you in love and how you have turned against that love in rebellion and how that puts you in a place of judgment before Him.

And you see that you can do nothing to solve your own guilt on your own. You can't say enough prayers. You can't do enough good deeds, and you can't give enough to charity. You can't go back and undo all the wrong you have done. But you don't have to. Jesus took all your wrong on Himself and died to take your guilt and sin and pay for it. Colossians 3-13-14. And so you cry out to Him in faith and trust and ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you and He promises that He will rescue you from your sin, your old way of life and God's wrath.

Paul is saying in verses 9-10 that we put sin to death because this has already happened to us. We don't put sin to death to try and make this happen to us. This is your identity now. And yet, your life is hidden with Christ and so there are moments when you don't fully feel this new identity and there are moments when you don't act like it. There are moments when you slip back into the old way

of life and when you act in evil desire, covetousness, slander, and that you may even lie.

But Paul says that to put sin to death you and I must lean into this identity more and more all the time and let this knowledge of Christ and what He has done for us renew us. Look again at verse 10. To renew is to make new and it is a process. If you are in Christ this morning you are being slowly formed so that your life and character will match your identity. What is the goal of that? Look at the end of verse 10. You will look more and more like Jesus.

But keep in mind that renewal is a process that begins at salvation and won't be fully completed in this life. It's not instant. This is why we must be patient with one another in our struggle. This is why we must be patient with ourselves as we grow, but we must always push forward to grow and change and be renewed. We must let the Word shape and form our minds, attitudes, and actions. Renew and replace. Deepen and strengthen. Change and grow.

Growing as we find our identity increasingly in Christ and less in typical earthly and human categories. Look at verse 11. How do humans typically identify themselves? What identities do we carry? Greek and Jew. National or ethnic pride. It's so easy to let our country of origin become the major factor in our identity. It's easy to let America become my all in all. Circumcised and Uncircumcised. Religious pride either because of how hard I try at religion or how much I reject God. Barbarian and Scythian. Two distinct cultures that point to cultural pride and identity. Finally, slave and free. Economic identity.

You certainly don't stop belonging to any of these groups or having these ethnic or cultural identities, but they aren't the defining feature of your life anymore when you are being renewed in knowledge after the image of Christ. What is your identity? Look at the end of verse 11.

*Here in Col 3:11 it speaks of Christ being the total concern, preoccupation, and environment of the Christian.* - Richard Melick

And there's a link between how you think of yourself and your actions, attitudes, loves and desires. Root yourself in your identity in Christ. Look away from self and

to Him to define you and to become your total concern, preoccupation and environment and this will help you to put the old ways to death.

But, of course, removing the old is not where we stop. We want to be renewed in knowledge and grow to resemble Christ. And what direction does that take us in? Look briefly at verses 12-14. Let's pray.

### Sermon Response Questions – 3/17/26

- Other than salvation, what is the most significant change that has happened in your life? In other words, a moment or event that you think of in terms of “before” and “after”.
- What’s the best book you have read (listened to) over the past few years?
- Let’s say that you encounter a new person at church who has been coming for a few months, but who isn’t exactly sure whether or not she has experienced conversion. She says she believes in God and Jesus but doesn’t know if she has come to faith or not. What would you say to her?
- How are verses 5-11 connected to verses 1-4 of chapter 3?
- What does it practically look like to put sin to death?
- Give a definition of one of the sins listed in verse 8.
- Explain the connection between identity and change in life according to verses 9-10.
- If verses 9-10 are true, why do Christians still sin?
- What are some practical ways to be renewed in knowledge? (v. 10)

- How does understanding that renewal is a process help us to be patient with one another? Why is this important within the church?
- Explain the possible earthly identities listed in verse 11. Which is most tempting for you to adopt?
- How do verse 5-11 connect to verses 12-17?