

Colossians 3:1-7
“The True Means of Spiritual Success”

Introduction:

In the previous chapter Paul wrote about how the fullness of God could be found in Christ alone. He wrote those things to counteract the heresies that were being spread in the Colossian church. As this passage opens, Paul turned to address how the fullness of God that is found in Christ was the means by which these believers could experience the fullness of life that Christ had promised to those whom He came to save (Jn.10:10). This was in contrast to the false teaching at Colossae which could never enable anyone to experience that fullness of life. The opening verses of this chapter have a very close connection with the closing verses of chapter two. In those verses Paul asserted that an ascetic approach to godliness was of no real value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh. Thus, it was an approach that would have no effect on the true root problem that leads people into sin. Instead, the only real remedy for sinful passions is found in the believer’s spiritual union with Christ. Because union with Christ enables the individual to die to sin’s dominating influence, and to die to the world’s way of thinking and acting. It also enables one to live an entirely new life characterized by obedience to God.

The false teaching in Colossae was neither Judaizing nor pure Gnosticism. We know that Paul was not refuting Judaizers because this letter contains no direct quotes from the OT (the only thing that would be persuasive when dealing with that heresy). In addition, unlike those letters where Paul was combating Judaizers (Galatians & Philippians) there is no mention of the proper place of circumcision or the law. We know that pure Gnosticism was not involved because it did not manifest itself in its complete form until the second century. The reality is that we cannot know precisely the nature of the particular heresy Paul was combating, nor can we give it a definitive label. Instead, what can be said is that what was taught was a syncretistic collection of distorted teachings from Judaism along with some notions from pagan Gentile religions. This teaching involved arrogant boasts about the supposed spiritual experiences of the leader of this group, a stress upon angelic worship, and ascetic self-discipline built around the ceremonial instructions of the Mosaic Law. This passage is transitional, moving from theological instruction to ethical exhortations. New life in Christ, that is rooted in the objective identification and participation of believers with Christ in His death and resurrection, lays a strong foundation for the injunctions to put away sinful behavior, to appropriate Christian virtue, and to reorder one’s life around the new values that define what it means to live the Christian life.

I. Understanding Who You Are: (vs.1-4)

Paul opened this passage by writing, “*If then you were raised with Christ*” (vs.1a). Some interpreters argue that the word “*if*” does not indicate uncertainty about the spiritual status of the Colossians, rather it introduces a premise upon which a conclusion is drawn. According to this viewpoint, the participation of these

believers in the death and resurrection of Christ was not in doubt. Thus, it is suggested it would be justifiable to translate the protasis of this conditional clause as “*since*” to convey that Paul was expressing an assumed fact. However, this involves a misunderstanding of the nature of a first-class conditional sentence. For one thing this view assumes a direct correspondence between language and reality, to the effect that the indicative mood is seen as the mood of absolute fact, rather than as perceived fact. This view is demonstrably false. This is proven by the fact that out of all the first-class conditional sentences, only 37% of them can be proven to express something factual. Additionally, there are thirty-six instances where a first-class condition is used in the New Testament where it is clear that it is not expressing something that is factual. The truth is that the force of the indicative mood, when properly understood, lends itself to the notion of a presentation of reality. In the first-class condition the conditional particle “*if*” turns such a presentation into a supposition. This does not mean that the condition is true or means since. It simply means that as far as the portrayal is concerned, the point of the argument is based on the author’s assumption of the reality of the condition.

It is helpful to remember that the teaching in this verse is built on the premise that the teaching of the heretics cannot subdue the influence of indwelling sin (2:22-23) but rather serves to sever the believer from the head of the body, Christ, who is the only true source of real spiritual life. The past tense reference to having been raised with Christ refers to the believer’s union with Christ that took place at the time of the believer’s conversion. The actual union with Christ took place through the baptism by the Spirit, which is pictured in the ritual of water baptism. Some scholars argue that the references here to death and resurrection are figurative metaphors that picture spiritual realities. However, this is not how these things are presented by Paul, Paul did not use these terms as figurative metaphors. Instead, Paul was writing about the believer’s actual participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, spiritually, the former self of the believer died, and this will be followed by the eventual physical death of the believer. Also, every Christian has had a real redemptive historical spiritual resurrection in Christ. This is the first phase of the gift of new life which will find its consummation at the end of the age when all believers experience their eventual physical resurrection. Therefore, Christians are not merely like beings who have been resurrected from the dead, they really are beings who have been resurrected from the dead.

This understanding of the implications of the believer’s identification with Christ in His resurrection was not only crucial to the Colossians for resisting the teachings and practices of the false philosophy of the heretics, it was also foundational to the process of eliminating sinful behavior and appropriating Christian virtue.

Under the assumption that the claim of the Colossian believers was true, Paul wrote the following admonition to them, “*seek those things which are above*” (vs.1b). The verb translated as “*seek*” is in the present tense, stressing constant, daily seeking. The Greek verb Paul used, like its English translation, means to search intently in order to find something. In this context, the seeking involves understanding and orienting oneself to something. This informs us that achieving

the goal of godliness is not something that comes automatically to the believer but is something that demands a diligent pursuit if it is ever to be achieved. Practically speaking, to seek the things above means to pursue a life on earth that is lived in conscious submission to the Lordship of Christ.

But precisely how are we to understand what Paul meant by the expression “*things above*”? In light of what Paul went on to write in the following verses, we can conclude that he was referring to heaven as the present dwelling place of Christ, for there and in Him one finds the definition of the sort of ethical life the believer is to live, in contrast to the sort of life that is defined by an earthly perspective and earthly values.

For Paul next went on to elaborate on the expression “*things above*” by writing that it is “*where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God*” (vs.1c). Whereas the false teacher encouraged his followers to focus on the heavenly realm that he had purportedly witnessed in his visions (2:18), Paul made it clear that at the center of Heaven was the exalted Christ, sitting at God’s right hand. The imagery of Christ being at the right hand of God pictured Him being in a special place of honor and glory, in a position above everyone else in Heaven other than God the Father Himself. Therefore, if the focus in Heaven itself was on Christ, certainly the focus of believers on earth should be on Him as well. Therefore, “*those things which are above*” refers to the entire heavenly realm, which has the enthroned Christ at its center. It is a way of referring to all those things that are ultimate, essential, and transcendent because they come from God through Christ. Therefore, Paul’s exhortation is equivalent to Jesus’ own exhortation that His followers are to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt.6:33). It includes everything that characterizes the age to come, life in the New Covenant, and what it means to have one’s citizenship in heaven (Phil.3:20).

Throughout the New Testament, ethical instructions are rooted in theological teachings. The idea is that since what defines a believer has changed what he or she is, it results in changes to the way the believer lives out his or her life. Contrary to the view of some, Paul was not advocating a form of mysticism. Rather he was exhorting his readers to cultivate a pre-occupation with heaven. This involves a pre-occupation with Christ who reigns there, and a pre-occupation with His purposes, plans and provisions. This perspective involves viewing people, things, and events in this world through eyes that possess an eternal focus.

The reference to Christ sitting at the right hand of God reflects the language of Psalm 110:1. This was a messianic prophecy that looked ahead to a time when the Davidic king would be appointed by God to a universal reign over creation. Paul was reminding his readers that in their time Jesus had been risen to this exalted position and had begun this prophesied reign. Thus, He was head over every rule and authority (2:10). Nevertheless, at this point in redemptive history, His reign has not been fully realized. This is because in God’s providence it has not yet been time for Him to be fully revealed to the world (vs.4). However, though all God’s enemies have not yet been finally subdued, this reference was meant to reinforce in the mind of these Christians that everything about their lives was under the

authority of Christ, including the evil spirits. Therefore, there was no need to fear them, or allow them to influence how they lived out their lives. Their only concern should be living in harmony with their Sovereign and Savior. Interestingly, Psalm 110:1 is alluded to more in the NT (a total of 23 times) than any other OT passage.

Next, Paul went on to give the Colossians a second admonition, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (vs.2). The Greek word translated as “*set your mind*” means to focus one’s thoughts on a particular thing. In this context, Paul was saying that believers are to focus their minds on things above as a goal or prize. The verb also conveys the ideas of setting one’s affections upon something, and directing one’s will toward it. Here Paul was giving a parallel admonition to the one he had given in verse one. The difference between the verbs is one of nuances in meaning. This second verb has a stronger emphasis on the individual’s thought process. The idea behind the use of this word is that what one thinks about, and how one thinks about it shapes how one lives. This means that one who has a fleshly mind inevitably leads a fleshly life, while those who are spiritually minded inevitably live a Spirit-oriented life (Rom.8:5; Gal.5:10). In this statement, the Greek adverb translated as “*above*” is transformed into a noun by the definite article that modifies it. The phrase “*things above*” is emphasized in the Greek text because it both occurs first in the sentence and before the main verb. The New Testament presents reality as being composed of two distinct realms, one that is above (where God dwells) and one that is below (the world of mankind). Within this perspective, Paul was instructing the saints in Colossae to orient themselves around the rule of Christ and heavenly priorities rather than around a charismatic human leader and earthly values. Also, since the things above are intimately oriented to Christ, to diminish one’s focus on His person and work, by focusing on the teachings of the heretics, was by definition to focus on earthly rather than heavenly things. The expression, “*earthly things*” refers to moral, not physical things (such as immorality, impurity, lust, etc., as listed in vs.5). Paul was not encouraging a kind of Gnostic disdain for material things. The truth is that every physical thing God created, including the body and sex, is good (Gen.1:27-30; I Tim.4:1-4). However, since having a physical body does give occasion for the works of the flesh (Rom.7:4-6), Paul warned against setting one’s focus on these things because it tends to pervert God’s purpose for them. The idea is that though earthly/physical pleasures can be enjoyed by the Christian, they are never to be the driving force or defining things in a Christian’s life. In this context, Paul was including certain religious ceremonies within the realm of “*earthly things*”. He did this because they were expressions of a religious system rooted in an earthly perspective and earthly motivations. Therefore, engagement in those things was improper for the Christian because they by nature focused one’s thoughts on earthly living. Although Paul readily acknowledged that God created everything on earth (1:16), and though he would have readily acknowledged that at creation everything God made was good (Gen.1:31), he also recognized that there has been a rupture in God’s creation (the Fall) that has resulted in the need for God’s creation to be cleansed and reconciled back to Him through the blood of the cross (1:20).

Therefore, not all things are presently good in every way as they originally were. It is precisely the impact of that moral rupture that is in view here. It has had a negative impact on social relationships, human desires, emotions, and sexuality.

Paul's words in this passage also betray an important principle of ministry. Key to God's purposes in salvation is the process of the transformation of an individual's mind so that they are able to engage in obedient submission to God's in both thoughts and actions. In helping others with this, it is important not simply to focus only on the wickedness of the vices that one might fall into, one must encourage a primary focus on the majesty of life that is available in Christ. The idea being that if believers are to be all they can be, they must replace bad appetites with virtuous ones. Therefore, this admonition to set one's mind on heavenly things and not earthly things does not mean that the believer should withdraw from the world and all the activities of this world to simply contemplate spiritual things. Instead, the idea is that after conversion, the Christian is meant to see everything against the backdrop of eternity. Paul was simply urging his readers not to allow their ambitions to be earthbound, set on transitory and inferior objects. Being a godly pilgrim in this life does not necessitate despising the comforts and pleasant things of the world, rather believers are not to set their hearts upon them so that these earthly things become more important than heavenly things. The things below are subordinate and instrumental, while those that are above are supreme and final. Contrary to the pure Gospel that the Colossians had originally received, the false philosophy of the heretics stressed the idea of human beings reaching out to God and winning Him over with their disciplined lifestyle, and highly spiritual worship. This was at odds with the Gospel because in it is the revelation that God in His grace saves sinners from themselves and transforms them by His power so that they reflect the moral nature of their Creator and Savior.

Then Paul explained why having a heavenly focus is so important. He wrote, "*For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*" (vs.3). The conjunction "*for*" was used by Paul to introduce the reason that the saints should seek and focus their attention on heavenly rather than earthly things. The Greek verb translated as "*died*" is in the aorist tense, indicating that the action of the verb is complete. Therefore, the death referred to here was something that had taken place in their past, thus it refers to when they were converted. The "*life*" that Paul refers to here is their post conversion life in Christ. Rather than simply re-stating that they had died and rose with Christ to a new life, Paul highlighted the idea that not everything about their new life was apparent, doing so with the words, "*your life is now hidden with Christ in God*". The Greek verb translated as "*hidden*" is in the perfect tense, which is used to indicate that Paul was speaking of an ongoing situation that resulted from a past action. This means that their true life was hidden at the time of their conversion (the same time that they died) and that life has remained hidden ever since. But in what sense is a believer's life "*hidden*"? The idea is that the richness of life that Paul has been describing that belongs to the Christian, is something that is physically indiscernible to both Christians themselves and to the surrounding world. The spiritual realities that already

define every true Christian will continue to be hidden from view (just like Christ is) until the end of the age, when the Christian's life will be unveiled for all to see. A common view among Evangelical interpreters is that this hiddenness implies that the believer's life is kept secure from danger. However, the problem with this conclusion is that the only words for hiddenness found elsewhere in the epistle refer to an apocalyptic concealment followed by revelation (1:26; 2:3). Furthermore, this same meaning is the typical meaning of the specific Greek term that Paul employed here. Since this word when used elsewhere always refers simply to something that cannot be seen or perceived until revealed, it is likely that the same notion applies to the meaning of the word here. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that this same terminology occurs in the very next chapter (vs.26) where it once again expresses God's revelation of something previously hidden. This hiddenness of the Christian life is part of the reason why those outside the faith (and some inside of it) don't understand the rationale for living like a Christian, things they see seem to contradict the Christian's claims.

The Greek phrase translated as "*with Christ in God*" refers to the sphere in which the believer's life is hidden, it is hidden in God, as Christ is presently hidden in God. Paul was stressing here that believers must not live by sight, but by faith in their resurrected identity with Christ in the heavenlies (II Cor.5:7). They must continue to trust that their hope has been laid up for them in heaven, where their inheritance is, even though they cannot see it or feel it in the present. Such trust would help protect them from being deceived by false teaching.

Then Paul wrote, "*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*" (vs.4). The temporal adverb translated as "*when*", is more accurately translated as "*whenever*". Conveying both that Christ's return is certain, and that the time of His return is unknown. Here Paul reveals that for the Christian, Christ is our life. And Christ is our life in the sense that He is the One who fills us with eternal spiritual life, therefore, the life and destiny of the believer is inextricably bound up with Christ.

In these verses we find a careful balance between the idea that some eschatological prophecies have been fulfilled in light of Christ's first coming, and the idea that there are other eschatological prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled and will not be until the Messiah's second coming. The Greek word translated as "*appears*" refers to that which is visible, manifest, made known, or conspicuous. This word is used a number of times in the NT to refer to the second coming (though it is not used as frequently as the Greek word "*parousia*"). The word used here refers to the physical arrival of Christ (which stresses the realization of the second coming), not to the idea of His coming (which stresses the idea of the anticipation of the second coming). This term's basic meaning also stresses the open visibility and splendor of Christ's second coming. The earlier reference to "*the hope of glory*" in chapter one (vs.27) clearly points to the consummation of glory for believers at a future point in time. This eschatological context is also apparent in this passage where Paul writes about the coming wrath of God (vs.6), an expression with very clear eschatological overtones. Here in this verse, the appearance of Christ is tied

to a future appearance by believers “*then you also will appear with Him in glory*”. Since the second coming is in view in regard to Christ’s appearing, the same must be true regarding the appearance of believers. To understand the meaning here it is important to remember that the Greek word translated here as “*appear*” means to manifest or show something. The use of this word in the same sentence as “*hidden*” indicates that the specific shade of meaning here for the word “*appear*” is the disclosure of something previously hidden. Therefore, Paul was writing about the future disclosure of the believer’s true life in Christ. The things written about this event elsewhere help us to understand what Paul was expressing here:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the workings by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Philippians 3:20-21

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

I John 3:2

Paul was explaining that though in the present, the true nature of the Christian’s life is hidden (meaning it cannot be physically seen or known) from ourselves and those around us, we are to have faith that our existence is greater than we can presently perceive, trusting that when the true nature of Christ Himself is revealed, our true nature will be revealed as well. The “*glory*” in which believers will appear is not a reference to Heaven, it is a reference to the glory of Christ. What will be revealed at that time then is that we bear a portion of Christ’s glory because of our union with Him. Therefore, at that future time, the glorious nature of the new lives we have in Christ will be fully disclosed. This will include the perfection of both the believer’s body and in spirit. The ethical instruction that Paul will give in the rest of the chapter is predicated on this Christian hope. Faith in this hope is meant to infuse us with the spiritual and emotional energy necessary to consistently pursue the things of Heaven rather than the things of earth (Rom.8:18-30).

II. Making Truly Wise Choices: (vs.5-7)

Having reminded the Colossians once again about what they had in Christ, Paul next turned to exhort them to act on these spiritual realities, he wrote, “*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth*” (vs.5a). The Greek word translated as “*therefore*” introduces the conclusion Paul presents in the following verses that rested upon the content of verses 1-4. The things taught in those verses then serves as the basis for the exhortations that follow. The Greek word translated as “*put to death*” literally means what the translation indicates, to execute or to kill. Since Paul was not instructing the Colossians to commit suicide, he was obviously using the term in a metaphorical way. When used as a metaphor,

the word conveyed the idea of rendering something powerless or unresponsive. The use of this strong language indicates that the believer is not merely to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes, they are to wipe them out completely, so they have no place in one's life. The idea here is similar to what Paul wrote to the believers at Rome, that believers are not to allow sinful tendencies to control them (Rom.6:12-13). In his letter to the Romans Paul stressed that in Christ the old self was already dead in terms of its power to control them, however, he added that believers needed to choose to live in light of this spiritual reality. Paul was stressing the same idea here, encouraging these saints to act in harmony with the spiritual truths of the Gospel. The aorist tense of the verb that Paul used here implies that a decisive act of faith is necessary to put this reality into practice. Therefore, the stress is on the need to choose to truly believe and then act on that belief. This is not something a believer does just once but is something that must be done repeatedly throughout one's life. One must choose to believe in and act in accordance with the truth of their new life in Christ if these things are to manifest themselves in our behavior. This represents a balance that is found throughout the New Testament. The power for godly living comes from the work of Christ, but believers are responsible to believe in and make use of that power. Paul did not simply instruct them to control themselves and stop sinning. If he had he would have been advocating the same approach as the false teacher. Personal discipline alone is not enough to enable one to restrain their immoral lusts; instead, the only way one can succeed is through faith in the provisions that God has said He has given to us. In this case, faith in the death of our old selves and the birth of our new selves in Christ.

Paul specifically instructed the Colossians to put their "*members*" to death. The Greek word translated as "*members*" here does not refer literally to bodily organs, but to bodily actions and attitudes. The idea is not giving into the impulses that emerge from one's body because of indwelling sin, and the temptations that are aroused as we live in this fallen world. However, it is important to understand that Paul did not use the word "*members*" to refer to a list of abstract vices. He used this designation, because these sinful impulses are not simply something external, rather, if they are indulged in any way they can become so much a part of what we are that they are almost indistinguishable from us.

Then Paul listed the "*members*" he specifically had in mind, "*fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*" (vs.5b). Paul focused first on these five things that needed to be eradicated from the lives of the Colossian believers. Given the totality of what we read in this letter, it is doubtful that these five were chosen because the false teaching had stimulated their practice, or that it had failed to deal with them. Rather these were standard lifestyle concerns, especially for gentiles in the early stages of Christian growth. The first term Paul used is the source of the English word "*pornography*". It was a general term that referred to any and every kind of deviant sexual practice. Therefore, "*sexual immorality*" would be a better translation than "*fornication*", since this English term is normally used in a far more restrictive sense than its Greek

counterpart. The second term Paul used “*uncleanness*” means exactly the same thing as the English translation. It was another general term to designate moral corruption. However, though it could refer to various forms of immorality, most often it was used to refer to sexual sins, and most linguists think that is how the term is used in this context. The third member mentioned is translated as “*passion*”. The Greek word “*pathos*” could be used to refer to a variety of emotions and affections, however, in a list such as this, it refers to dishonorable passions. This term is routinely used for sexual desires that have gone awry, in the sense of unrestrained sexual lust, or perhaps more accurately, physical or emotional passion. In Romans 1:26 Paul connected this word with sexual desires expressed within same sex relations by women and men. In I Thessalonians 4:5, Paul used this term to refer to the sort of unrestrained sexual desire that was typical of Roman males in the first century. The fourth term translated as “*evil desire*” was built off a general word for any sort of strong desire, but here it is qualified as being evil or wicked in nature. It is observed that in I Thessalonians chapter four, verses three through twelve (a passage where Paul specifically writes about sexual sin), that Paul uses much of the same vocabulary as he does it. Because of this it is argued that Paul must also have been writing exclusively about sexual immorality when he used these four terms here. However, Paul’s use of vocabulary in the Thessalonian letter is similar, but not exactly the same as his use here, so this comparison is not overly convincing. A majority of scholars believe that these first four terms all relate to sexual sin. Given the sexual obsession that existed among Gentile men in the first century this is certainly possible. However, three of the words are so general that these could also be references to the wicked impulses that lead human beings to commit a wide variety of sins, and this seems to fit the context better.

The fifth member that Paul told the Colossians to put to death was “*covetousness*”. The Greek word Paul used refers to an insatiable desire to have more and it carries with it that it is the desire to have what is forbidden. In both Roman Catholicism and ancient Judaism, it is traditionally taught that the sin of covetousness was the original sin in the garden. Though this cannot be conclusively demonstrated from Genesis, the placement of this sin at the end of the Ten Commandments (Ex.20:1-17) and Paul’s discussion of it in the Book of Romans (7:7-13) seem to imply that it is not only a sin in itself, but is at the root of all other sins. This also makes logical sense as the desire for more things leads to theft, the desire for someone else’s spouse leads to adultery, the desire for more prestige leads to evil ambition, the desire for more power leads to tyranny, etc. Paul then wrote “*which is idolatry*”. The question is whether the relative pronoun “*which*” refers just to idolatry, or if it refers to all of the sinful dispositions that Paul listed in this verse. A similar listing appears in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (5:5), and that verse raises the same interpretive question as this one. The best answer seems to be that since all five words refer to unrestrained desires that take control of an individual, that Paul was intending to equate them all with idolatry. Another thing that favors this interpretation is that these sorts of sinful dispositions were characteristic of Gentile paganism. The idea seems to be that when desire for anything is control of

a person, those desires have usurped God from His proper place as lord of one's life. Essentially allowing these desires to control one's life manifests the choice to serve oneself as the primary object of one's devotion.

Then Paul reminded the Colossians why it is so important to put these things to death. He wrote, "*Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience*" (vs.6). The Greek term translated as "*because of*", could also be translated "*on account of these things*". The idea in the expression is that it gives the reason why people are judged by God. The neuter plural relative pronoun translated as "*these things*" refers back to all five of the members of the body that Paul said are to be put to death in the previous verse and added that God will hold humanity accountable for the practice of these sins. This concluding declaration of the certainty of God's judgment on these practices is consistent with Paul's other vice lists that we find in the New Testament (I Cor.6:10-11; Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:3-6). In the New Testament, vice lists function to depict the lifestyle of people who are in enmity with the Holy God of the Bible and who thus suffer eternal condemnation. Therefore, in contrast to the vice lists in the general Greek culture these in the NT are elevated to a whole new level of seriousness. The warning of judgment in this verse underscores the need to take seriously the exhortation that Christians do away with these things. God's wrath is not to be understood as a momentary emotion, but as a settled disposition, a principle of retribution. God's wrath is the active reaction of His nature to that which is contrary to His righteousness and goodness. It is a recoiling of God's entire being in response to evil. And this reference to God's wrath is meant to be understood in the eschatological context of final judgment. Throughout the Bible, God's wrath is connected with both the jealousy of God as well as to a system of cause and effect that God has written into the fabric of this world; the retributive manifestation of inevitable consequences incurred by those who freely choose a course of life that sets them at odds against the law of the Creator. It is theological reductionism to connect wrath only with holiness. God does not operate out of His attributes but out of His personhood and being, inasmuch as God is love and holy, God's wrath therefore emerges from all that He is. Scripture teaches us that God's wrath fits within His overall plan, which is holy and good, that it ultimately has an appropriate moral cause. The words "*is coming*" are rendered in the present tense. This conveys that in some sense God's wrath has already begun to be expressed (John 3:36) and that it will culminate in His future climactic visitation on evil (Rom.2:5; II Thess.1:7-9). Paul then wrote that the objects of this coming wrath are "*the sons of disobedience*". The words "*sons of*" is a common Semitic manner of expression that characterizes people by the descriptive terms in the generative case that follows, therefore, the phrase "*sons of disobedience*" denotes those whose lives are characterized by defiance of the Law of God. Paul was not indicating that genuine believers face the possibility of experiencing God's wrath, for other Scriptures make it clear that those who are in Christ will never experience His wrath (Rom.8:1). The warning was directed toward those had only professed to have faith, who had not yet genuinely believed and were therefore in a situation where they could be tempted into surrendering

their lives to sin rather than to Christ. For the true saints this was a reminder that indulgence in the things that arouse God's anger is diametrically opposed to what it means to be a Christian. And though all these evil deeds precipitate the final manifestation of God's wrath upon the individual, conversely it must be understood that one's good deeds cannot deliver that person from the wrath that their sin aroused. The individual can only create the cause for their condemnation; they cannot bring about their salvation.

Paul closed the passage by writing, "*in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them*" (vs.7). This verse has the following chiasmic structure:

A in which
B you walked
C once
C when
B you lived
A in them

The relative pronoun "*which*" refers to the vices that were used to characterize the lives of his readers, it does not refer to the people among whom they used to live. This conclusion is supported by Paul's use of the Greek demonstrative pronoun that is translated as "*them*" at the end of the verse, instead of using the Greek personal pronoun. This indicates that this was a reference to the list of vices, since Paul very rarely used the demonstrative pronoun when referring to people. Also, though it is invisible in this English translation, Paul used a Greek conjunction in this verse that can be translated as "*and*". However, that translation does fit, therefore it conveys the meaning "*also*" expressing in an emphatic way that the saints had at one time also been characterized by these same sins, though it also implies that they were no longer characterized by these sins since their conversion. The aorist form of the verb translated as "*walked*" has summary force (referencing the course and habit of their entire lives prior to their conversion), while the verb translated as "*lived*" is in the imperfect tense, stressing the daily continuity of their previous sinful lifestyle. Additionally, the contrast between their former lives and their present existence in Christ was highlighted by the temporal indicator "*once*". The concluding idea is that Paul expected those who were genuinely Christians to live ethically superior lives to the unbelievers who surrounded them.

Conclusion:

What Paul wrote in this passage was meant as the true alternative to asceticism. Paul explained that what was needed to achieve godliness was transformation of one's nature not just the improvement of one's behavior. The truth is that we sin because we are sinners, while the false assumption of the false teaching was that we are sinners only because we sin. Understanding the true nature of the sin problem is crucial to understanding how to properly go about solving that problem. Discipline alone at best results in sinners who are less immoral. True godliness results from the renewal of our minds, perspectives, and values. Improvement in behavior simply reveals how successful the transformation process has been so far.