

Colossians 3:5-11

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.

We are being renewed in knowledge after the image of our Creator. We have been justified, declared innocent in God's sight for the sake of the innocent suffering and death of our Lord Christ, and now we are being renewed. Notice, though, we were justified. That happened. That is done. We are justified through faith. We are being renewed, though. It is an ongoing process. It is a process worked by and through the Spirit, yet while we were completely passive parties to our justification, declared not guilty through faith, which is not our work, but God's gift, we do play a part in our renewal. No, we do not renew ourselves. But yes, we are called not to work against that renewal, and to be faithful in those things through which the Spirit works. Sin stunts growth, sorrows the Spirit, and stifles sanctification. Purposeful, willful, persistent sin makes such renewal untenable, robs us of the gift of God, and again casts us out of paradise.

St. Paul lists sins that we should put to death. They are sins that reflect a misguided and ill-anchored heart. They spring from desire. They are the result of an unchecked will. They are the product of meditation upon empty thoughts and promises that ought to be shooed away with the thoughts and promises of God instead of entertained. Sexual immorality abuses God's good gift by making it subject to the inward-turned, temporary, uncommitted, and irresponsible whims of the flesh. It takes what is not my own, my body, which Christ has bought with His own blood, and defiles the Spirit's temple which Christ will raise on the last day, for eternal life or death. He says to put to death impurity, that which springs from impure motives, profligate, reckless, extravagant, self-aggrandizing. He lists passion, which, in this case, means a loss of control of one's desires. Paul is talking about when our appetite trumps good judgment, so that we make decisions more like a beast than a rational creature. He then builds on this by mentioning evil desire. Theologians speak of concupiscence. It means that I look at something sinful and instead consider it good, as the devil managed to do with Eve in the garden, so that the fruit that would work her very death became pleasant in her eyes. Finally, he mentions covetousness, wanting what I cannot or should not have. Why is that idolatry? Why are all these sins idolatry? All of these sins place my will, my desire, my honor, and my glory above that of anyone or anything else. They reveal that much more than having a God, we want to be gods, worshipped, served, and praised. And so the next sins he lists all have to do with our response to others not treating us as such, as gods, as the center of their existence: *anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.*

Christians have been born again. As Christians we are new creations. We are to walk in newness of life, not to tumble back into the grave. Why would one raised to life choose to wear the rags he was buried in instead of the perfect robe produced and placed upon him by his Savior, Redeemer, and dearest Friend? Why would one put to death by another choose to give his love to the one who killed him, sin and the devil, instead of to the one who brought him back to life, and not just any life, but eternal life in the blessedness of heaven one day? Yet that is the decision we make when we let the old Adam have his way, when we let our flesh silence the Spirit, when we

grab glory for ourselves instead of giving glory to God through daily lives of humble and grateful obedience. The formula for the Christian life is this, as St. Paul gives it: "*Christ is all, and in all.*" And so "*put on the new self,*" then, "*which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*"