

Sermon for Pentecost 11 (Series C)

Text: Colossians 3:1-11

Preached on 08-05-2007

Introduction:

What is the main purpose of the Bible? If we were to ask someone off the street that question, I expect that some people might say, "It has no value at all. It was written so long ago, it has no relevance for our lives today. It's been so pulled apart and interpreted in so many different ways that you really can't believe anything it says." That's one view. Another perspective would be those who see the Bible as a great guide for their lives; who think of it in terms of the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Now, even though that is a very popular view of the Bible, I have to tell you that it is not entirely accurate. The Bible is not primarily a rule book for our lives. It's not some kind of instruction manual that will win us some brownie points with God. No, the primary purpose of this book (The Bible) is not to tell us what we are to do for God, but rather to tell us what God HAS done for us. John says, "**The Bible was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name**" (John 20:31). Not until we have this understanding of the Bible, will we be able to follow...

Theme: God's Rules For Holy Living!

Part I: We have been raised with Christ (vv. 1-4)

Part II: We are to kill off every temptation (vv. 5-10)

Part I: We have been raised with Christ (vv. 1-4)

The Christians to whom Paul originally wrote this letter had been won for Christ from an ungodly society. Their new-found Christian values and Christian way of life soon came under heavy fire, however. Temptations surrounded them to turn their backs on the God that had saved them. They were encouraged to return to the kind of living that satisfied their sinful desires. That's precisely why Paul encouraged them to remember what God had done for them. He gives us the same encouragement today. He states how we have been given new life through Jesus' redeeming work, saying "**You have been raised with Christ**" (v. 1). The word for *raised* here emphasizes the completed action that Jesus has already accomplished on our behalf. We have been rescued from our previous, life-less slavery to sin and unbelief. We have been set free from the eternal death we were formerly destined for. Our sins ARE forgiven! Heaven IS ours! All guaranteed and secured for us by Jesus' own resurrection.

The Apostle Paul encourages us, therefore, to concentrate on those things that reflect our new life in Christ, turning away from every covetous, evil desire. He said, **“You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (v. 3)**. Paul’s point is that we, spiritually speaking, are now dead to our old way of life. Rebelling against God’s will and falling under His just wrath and condemnation is over and done with. We have died to it. Not only have we died, but we also have been raised from our spiritually dead state.

Application:

What exactly does that mean though, that we, **“Have been raised with Christ” (v. 1)**? Well, in order for a person to be raised, that is, brought back from the dead, what must be true of that person? He must first be dead, right! People who are alive cannot be raised from the dead. That would be a complete contradiction in terms. Only dead people, therefore, can be raised from the dead. So who are the dead people Paul is referring to? You and I are! The Bible says, **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1)**. The last time I checked, a dead person cannot do anything. In the same way, being spiritually dead from conception (**Psalm 51:5**), there is absolutely nothing we can do to earn our salvation.

BUT then, **“When we were dead in our sins and in the uncircumcision of our sinful nature, God made us alive with Christ” (Colossians 2:13)**. Whether it was through the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism or hearing the Gospel message as an adult, at some point, the Holy Spirit knocked down the dividing wall of sin and unbelief that had formerly separated us from God. We became so connected to Christ that everything He did (over 2,000 years ago), suddenly got credited to our account. His sinless life became our perfect, flawless life! His death on the cross canceled out our sins! His resurrection from the dead gave us a clean slate with God. The point Paul is nailing down for us here is to be absolutely clear about what God has done for us. In a word: Everything! What follows in our every day lives is a mere reflection, showing our appreciation for everything God has done.

Transition:

So long as the old sinful nature still resides in us, however, we’ll never be able to follow *God’s Rules For Holy Living* the way we ought to. That is why...

Part II: We are to kill off every temptation (vv. 5-10)

Having been raised with Christ, Paul tells us to, **“Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (v. 5)**. Here Paul gives us a list of traits, different attitudes and actions which are evidence of sin rearing its ugly head in our lives. In each case, Paul’s advice to us is, **“Put it to death” (v. 5)**. The word for *put to death* here means to turn something into a corpse. In other words, every time sin starts to show up in our lives; every time it sprouts up in our thoughts, words, or actions, Paul says to kill it off.

One of the main things we are to kill off from ourselves is, **“Sexual immorality” (v. 5)**. Now I know the world says that having sex is no big deal; that it’s perfectly natural as long as you have decided the time is right for you. But that’s not what the Bible says! Paul doesn’t say to cover up sexual activity or to make excuses for it. He says that all sexual activity, outside of marriage, is to be killed off! He says to put to death, **“Whatever belongs to your sinful nature” (v. 5)**, and sexual immorality is right at the top of the list, followed by some closely related sins, **“Impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (v. 5)**. Did you notice how many things in Paul’s list really deal with the human heart? God knows where our problems with sin begin. Jesus Himself said, **“Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, and sexual immorality” (Matthew 15:19)**. God knows that if we are going to live as His forgiven children, then we will wage war with our Old Self, daily struggling to kill it off. That means saying, **“NO!”** to sexual invites and lustful temptations. That means refusing to live together outside of marriage. When we do that, we are setting ourselves apart from the unbelieving world, showing ourselves to be God’s true children.

Application:

I don’t know about you, but as I take a look through the list of things that God tells us to kill off: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, adultery, evil desires, greed, idolatry, murder, etc., I can’t help but think to myself, **“Man, I’m guilty of every, single one of those things. I have done them all; if not outwardly, then certainly inwardly.”** That’s absolutely true too! Your Pastor shouldn’t be preaching to you right now. Your Pastor should be burning in Hell right now. But that’s the biggest reason why God included lists like this in His Word to begin with: to show us just how miserable, weak, and sinful we really are.

BUT remember what God has done for us in Christ! He has done what no one else could. He has credited everything Jesus did to our account! There are no “ifs” or “maybes” about anything Jesus did either. His life; His death; His resurrection are all accomplished facts! They happened! Nothing at all can undo them. We reap the benefits by Faith Alone! Even though the world may not see our faith, it can still see the evidence that our faith exists, but only when we say, “NO!” to every evil, lustful, and covetous desire that springs up in our sinful selves. How can we do this? The answer is right here, in this book (The Bible). What do you think Jesus used in fighting off Satan’s temptations in the wilderness? Pick it up! Read it! Then you too will be able to kill off every temptation.

Conclusion:

Another thing that really needs to be killed off in our world is every form of discrimination. Paul said, **“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (v. 11)**. The Apostle would not have made all these distinctions if discrimination had not been a big problem in his day. Similar discrimination, some subtle, some not so subtle, is still a big problem today. As long as there are differences of race, religion, sex, nationality, and color, discrimination will always exist in this fallen world. God, however, makes no distinction among human beings. He simply says that all people are sinners. He lumps us all together in the same basket. We are like rotten apples in His sight. Nothing more!

BUT God also made no distinction when sending His Son to save mankind. Regardless of race, color, rank, or social standing, Christ died for all people. God’s grace in Christ, therefore, knows no barriers. It bridges every ethnic divide, making absolutely no distinction from one person to the next. Neither should we, then! Especially when it comes to the all-important work of sharing Jesus with others! After all, that is God’s # 1 rule for holy living! So instead of looking at the Bible as some kind of guide book for our lives, understand the main purpose of it. The Bible says that (1) we have been raised with Christ. In response to this Good News, (2) we are to kill off every temptation. These are *God’s Rules For Holy Living!* Amen!