

Colossians Part 4: Alive In Christ

Week 2: Killing the zombie

Sunday, March 12th 2023

- **Two weeks ago we talked about the all-important meaning of FAITH. Not faith to believe in the first place, but the purpose of faith as people who DO BELIEVE.**
- **BIG takeaway was faith- through lens of great emphasis of NT- AND objective lens of human experience- isn't how we convince God to change the nature of our circumstances- RATHER, faith is how we open our hearts and mind for God to change OUR NATURE in the midst of our circumstances.**
- **We asked the question... "WHAT IF Faith isn't primarily about what we want God TO DO, but rather- Faith is about us understanding, believing, and experiencing the goodness OF WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE?"**
- **In first 2 chapters of Colossians this is exactly what Paul has been describing: What God has already done, what is already true of us IN CHRIST- the hope we ALREADY HAVE by faith!**
- **And now arriving at today's text, Paul shifts gears, changing his focus from what is already true of us INTERNALLY, to how this must inevitably change how we live EXTERNALLY.**
- **Simply put, today's scripture proclaims- you've been MADE NEW, CHRIST IS YOUR LIFE, so LIVE LIKE IT!**
- **Paul's going to explore this from two perspectives- Next Sunday we'll the positive perspective- what it looks like for us to 'clothe ourselves' with the nature and character of Christ.**
- **Today Paul comes at this from negative perspective- describing the kind of life we have put behind because it is no longer who we are.**
- **Past few weeks- ZOMBIE metaphor- (you know- zombie is dead person we used to be- flesh- follows us around lying, trying to convince us it is who we still are). NOW Paul is telling us how we must KILL...**

✠ Killing the zombie

- **Lets read the whole passage. Colossians 3:5-11**

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

- **Big and clear charge: When it comes to moving away from the brokenness of our old nature- we must-**

✠ Show no mercy!

- **We need context here. Paul is writing into pagan Roman culture of 1st century. This scripture speaks to us all, but what Paul describes as 'life YOU once lived' ISN'T necessarily life YOU lived before you believed.**

- *First century Roman society was brutal. Life was cheap, love was scarce, murder and abuse was commonplace- especially abuse of women and children- deceit was the status quo, sexual immorality was unrestrained, exploitive and abusive, and everywhere.*
- *We can find this level of brokenness in parts of our culture today, but it's not everywhere. But if you were to describe the worst examples of sin, brokenness, and suffering in western society today- that would pretty much describe the totality of society, all the time, in the first century roman world.*
- *In the letter to Titus we see life described like this...*

Titus 3:3 *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

- *Point: there are voices in our culture- often a blend of political and religious- constantly telling us this level of pervasive abject brokenness describes the whole of our society, and this is simply not true. Over the years I've had the privilege to become friends with many people with whom I would disagree- even strongly- when it comes to many political, social, and even moral issues- and yet, there is no envy, hatred, or malice between us at all, and I've found many of these people to be kind, generous, servant- hearted, and loving.*
- *NOW, MAKE NO MISTAKE, our culture is full of pain, suffering, deception, selfishness, pride, and...*

† The great brokenness of sin

- *As Jesus said, the wages of sin IS DEATH- and not just in the idea of hell, but RIGHT NOW. The goal of the enemy, and the end result of the human condition- is heartbreak and devastation!*
- *And yet there is a narrative in our culture that we don't see in scripture- it is the idea of 'us against them'... idea that we are fighting against people who are evil, enemies of what is rightfully ours, who propagates sin and brokenness- and it's then so easy to broadly apply that label to categories of people.*
- *In stark contrast, in the New Testament- specifically the book of Acts- the brokenness of our world is not presented as an enemy to be fought against, but as enslaved people who need to be set free- and WE- as disciples of Jesus- bring this freedom and hope by realizing that we are now part of God's NEW CREATION*
- *WE have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom- the NEW WAY, THE NEW AGE, of the Grace, Mercy, and goodness of Christ- and as we LIVE THIS OUT AS A REDEEMED COMMUNITY OF HOPE, in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit, people will respond to this hope and choose to also enter into the light of the hope that we bear... and one person, one life at a time, that hope grows and spreads, transforming a society from the inside out, and through the power of love, not law.*
- *KEY! So when Paul gives us examples of sin's devastation, he's not doing it to condemn surrounding world, but to remind US of WHO WE NOW ARE, and the brokenness from which we've been set free.*
- *And so to the Colossians, Paul now says...*

Colossians 3:5b,8 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

- *Let's go deeper here*

- **PUT TO DEATH** what belongs to **YOUR** old nature. Note the focus- what is the way the enemy seeks to sabotage **YOU**? What is going on in **YOUR** heart and soul that is no longer who you are **In Christ**.
- The examples in verse 5 all relate to sexual sin and brokenness. This is present in almost every- if not every- description of the human condition we find in the NT. The devastation of sexual brokenness cannot be overstated, and so we need to really consider the core issue Paul is getting at.
- Sexual immorality is a broad description of any actions that distort God's gift of sexuality. "Impurity" and "Lust" speaks to the inner attitudes and ways of thinking that lead to sexual immorality.
- "Evil desires and greed" speaks to the breadth of how our hearts are corrupted by lust, like a poison that causes us to crave more of what is killing us. Lastly, Paul identifies the breadth of sexual brokenness for what it is- idolatry- where our desire for unfettered and self-centered gratification becomes what we worship. And by the way, lust and self-serving gratification isn't limited to sexuality.
- Could talk about this topic for long time- but if we look across NT and assess the world into which Paul wrote- some important themes emerge about the core issue of sexual sin.
- ALL about self-gratification. Sexual immorality places desires of self above humanity and God-given value of another. NOTE- Just because cheap sex may be consensual doesn't mean it still isn't all about self, and doesn't take away the damage done. Importantly, consensual cheap sex is rarely truly consensual- it favors person in power, even when consent is given.
- Sexual immorality objectifies. It devalues people, on both sides of whatever the sexual dynamic may be. It hardens the heart by robbing and distorting the human dignity given by God. This is reason pornography is so devastating.
- Sexual immorality victimizes. It is an abuse of power- not always- but almost always by men.
- Sexual immorality tends to blame its brokenness on the promiscuity of women rather than confronting the hearts and attitudes of men, if not excusing (even celebrating) the behavior of men.
- Finally- and this is important for the church to hear in the midst of much current dialog about the immorality of our world- and there's lots of it... **HUMBLY** I say...
- The vast majority of brokenness, suffering, objectification and victimization resulting from sexual sin happens within the **HETEROSEXUAL WORLD**. The notion that homosexuality or the **LGBTQ** community is the greatest threat of sexual immorality facing our country is just not the case.
- **YES** there is sexual unhealth and brokenness within the **LGBTQ** community, just as there is throughout every community- but to make homosexuality the primary litmus test of sexual morality is to obscure the profound warning scripture makes to **US**- to the church- **PUT TO DEATH WHAT BELONGS TO YOUR** earthy nature- **PUT TO DEATH** the impurity, lusts, greed, idolatry that may be present in **YOUR HEART**.

- **Because we all know the consuming fire of sexual sin can happen within marriage, including Christian marriages, and it is all too present within the church.**
- **WHEW! Moving on... In verse 8 Paul continues his list**
But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other...
- **These all share in common what happens when we allow pride to run rampant, when our hearts are obsessed with gratifying and defending SELF- directing anger and self-defense onto people or groups of people rather than dealing with our own fear and our own sin.**
- **EMPHATICALLY, Paul says NO MORE! You must RID YOURSELF of such things- this implies a highly intentional set of actions. (I'm going to quote a bit from NT WRIGHT for a minute)**
- **“When a tide of anger is felt, it must be dealt with as the alien intruder is really is, and turned out of your house as having no right to be there at all, much less giving orders.” This is not easy, but must be our focus, relying upon God’s grace within us.**
- **Paul’s description here is exhaustive...**
- **Anger- continues state of smoldering hatred**
- **Rage- when seething anger actually breaks out in angry deeds and words**
- **Malice- not just evil, but evil intended to cause harm**
- **Slander- speech which put’s malice into effect- speech which intentionally harms another person. Interesting note- the Greek word here is ‘blasphemia’- speech which dishonors God himself. Think of that- to slander, lie about, or put down another person- who regardless of who they are is still created in God’s image- is equated here with speech that attacks God himself.**
- **Filthy language. This isn’t just about saying ‘bad words’- maybe not even mostly. Filthy language connotes speech that hurts both the speaker and the hearer- and the emphasis is speech that seeks to lower the value of another person.**
- **FOR EXAMPLE- you could find communities of professing Christians who may never let slip a single four letter word, but where gossip, dishonesty, and slander is not uncommon. Such communities are far closer to the scriptures warning here than someone’s whose speech is just a bit salty.**
- **And then Paul saves the big one for last- focusing on the great damage caused by our speech, he concludes with DO NOT LIE TO EACH OTHER. Simply put, intentional dishonesty- for the purpose either of advancing or defending self- is incompatible with our new nature in Christ.**
- **WE ALL struggle with honesty at times, and we should take note that Paul lists it right along with the clearly destructive actions of anger, rage, malice, slander, and rampant sexual immorality.**
- **NOW- books have been written on the ethics of honesty, and if there are dynamics when some form of dishonesty- even if passively- is the right and ethical thing to do. Are there times that unfettered honesty, all the time, would violate the greatest ethical lens, which is LOVE? I’m not going to make that determination- this is something we must all wrestle with before God and the Holy’s spirits work in our conscience.**

- Key questions are “Am I truly being honest with God, honest with myself, and truly surrendered to God in this situation? Is what I do with the truth an expression of my new nature In Christ, or the self-deception of my old nature- the zombie I’m seeking to kill?”
- **MUCH more that could be discussed there, but gotta move on... We now turn to the hinge statement in the whole passage,**

Colossians 3:6 *Because of these...*

✠ The wrath of God **is coming**

- *I’m reading from the NIV- some of the ancient manuscripts also add “upon those who are disobedient”- your translation may have a form of this. The emphasis is that God’s wrath is not arbitrary or unjust- it is a response to the actions of evil that harms and devalues His good creation.*
- *This is an impossibly huge topic that I can barely address right now, other than to say this.*
- **SIN HAS A CONSEQUENCE.** *The evil, suffering, and brokenness of the human condition that has rejected the Lordship and Goodness of God will bring a response from God. As humanity, we are accountable to God for our choices and actions.*
- **IN CHRIST** *we are free from the fear of judgement, but we are not released from our accountability to God for our actions in this life.*
- **HEAR THIS-** *Scripture NEVER MINIMIZES the great devastation of sin, and as God’s people, WE must never minimize the devastation of sin. Sin damages and ravages God’s beautiful and precious creation, and time and again scripture tells us that God will respond.*
- *NOW, honest people who love the Lord and hold a high view of scripture can debate the nature of God’s wrath, what it looks like, whether it is punitive or restorative, and how it works with the related- but not synonymous- concepts of final judgment and hell.*
- *But the consequence of rejecting and violating God’s lordship and goodness is no trivial matter, which Paul makes very clear.*
- *Paul goes on in verse 7 to say:*

⁷*You used to walk in these ways, (ongoing normal pattern of behavior) in the life you once lived.*

- *In other words, THIS IS NO LONGER WHO YOU ARE! You USED to live this way, you USED to be in bondage to this way of thinking- BUT NO MORE!*
- *In Romans 6:2 Paul exclaims... “We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”*
- *THINK of image of a toddler who has learned to walk. It used to crawl, but now its nature is to walk, to run. What would happen if this child, after a period of time, tried to only crawl? It wouldn’t just be inconvenient; it would be profoundly damaging! Their bodies are no longer designed to crawl.*
- *Likewise, when we, as disciples who have DIED TO SIN, CONTINUE TO VIOLATE the character and nature of Christ- when we fail to love- we are doing something unnatural, and it harms not only those around us, it harms US, often principally. It’s like we are taking our new lives that are bright, loving, and vibrantly alive in Christ, and clothing them in the dead corpse of who we used to be.*
- *And so back to verse 9, Paul says... DON’T DO THAT! STOP IT! Don’t dress yourself any longer in those old filthy rags, because God has dressed you in a new...*

✠ A change of clothes

Colossians 3:9-10 *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

- **SO MUCH HERE- I must be concise!**
- **This is one of Paul's greatest themes in all his writing- that IN CHRIST the old has gone and the new has come.**
- **We tend to mis-translate the word here for SELF- making it more individualistic than it is. We are now part of God's NEW CREATION FAMILY- we are citizens of the community heaven, so why would we behave differently? They don't behave like this in heaven!**
- **BIG THOUGHT is that our New Self is GOOD! The old stereotype- unfortunately reinforced by parts of Christian culture- is that becoming a Christian is taking of the FUN AND FREE self, and putting on the straightjacket of religious legalism. THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE! It is in our NEW SELF that our FULL and vibrant humanity emerges as the shackles of our old broken humanity are thrown off (NTW). It is IN CHRIST that human beings can actually be what God intended us to be- alive, free, healthy, joyful, content, fulfilled, loving, and dependent only upon the life of our creator.**
- **Note how the OLD SELF is defined by its practices- while the NEW SELF is defined by its SOURCE. As part of God's new creation community, our NEW SELF- who we truly are- is constantly being renewed in our understanding and experience of the very image of God. Our old self was defined by our behavior, while our NEW SELF is defined by our IDENTITY, and when we live in the GOOD of our new identity it WILL lead to transformation in our behavior!**
- **Saying when I was a kid- "If you squeeze an orange, you get orange juice"- meaning that when life squeezes us, what's really inside comes out. AND WHEN we live with Christ as our identity and source, and the reality of life squeezes us--- it will be JESUS that comes out!**
- **Paul concludes by addressing what may be one of the single greatest devastating markers of sin and brokenness in the humanity condition, proclaiming that IN CHRIST there is now...**

✠ No division

Colossians 3:11 *Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, (Galatians 3:28, 'nor is there male and female') but Christ is all, and is in all.*

- **Paul lists some of the greatest societal, religious, and cultural divisions of the first century world- and he could have listed many more.**
- **The ancient world, was an elaborate network of prejudice, suspicion, division, and exclusion, so ingrained that it just seemed normal.**
- **Tragically this is still true today. And even though we would say our world- specifically our country- has come a long way since past generations- we must recognize that both the root and the effect of prejudice, division, sexism, racism and hatred still contaminates our culture, and is all too present within parts of Christian culture and the church.**
- **And so it is with stunning clarity that Paul challenges this status quo of all human history, declaring such divisions- whatever their root- are IRRELEVANT In Christ. Such divisions are ultimately a denial of the creation of humankind in the image of God.**
- **This ISN'T to say that there aren't differences among people- of course there are, and these are good.**

- ***IT IS TO SAY that differences such as nationality, race, color, language, social standing, gender, and many others- must now be regarded as irrelevant when it comes to the question of love, honor, kindness, and respect that the nature and character of Christ demands be shown to all people and groups of people.***
- ***The exclamation point here is that it's not just that In Christ all these false divisions must be put aside- EVEN MORESO- CHRIST IS ALL, AND IS IN ALL.***
- ***This calls us back to the profound passage we wrested with in Colossians 1:15-20, where Paul exhaustively declares the presence and supremacy of Christ in ALL THINGS. Because this is true, practically, if we take the nature and character of Christ seriously, IN CHRIST there can be NO barriers between human beings.***
- ***NT Wright puts it powerfully when he says- "wherever one looks, one sees Christ! When an elderly person is ignored, Christ is ignored. When a child is bullied or snubbed, Christ is snubbed. When a poor or colored person is mistreated, Christ is mistreated. When a community of people is feared or hated, Christ is feared and hated.***
- ***WE MUST NOT ALLOW the prejudices and divisive thinking of our old humanity- and they are many, and can be subtle- we must not allow these to distort the NEW HUMANITY of the NEW CREATION COMMUNITY into which we have now been born.***
- ***WHEW! I had another thought, but we will punt that to the beginning of next week, as Paul changes his focus from the old way of life that has gone to the new source and kind of life that has come***