

Paul's Practice 2: The Local Church (Colossians 3:10-11)

To Read:

1. John 17
2. Romans 5:12-6:14
3. I Corinthians 15:35-49

1 I. Introduction

A. This morning we're starting the third section of Colossians in Colossians 3:5-11

1. But, again, before we start, I want to remember what Colossians is about and how Colossians is organized
- 1 2. So, we'll start with our purpose statement for Colossians: Colossians calls us to see how truly glorious Jesus is and to root all of our hope in Him knowing that He is true wisdom to meet our every need. This will prevent us from instead pursuing the hopes and purposes of this world and being captured by worldly wisdom.
- 1 3. And the outline we're Colossians, we are looking at Colossians in four parts:
 - 1 a. Rooted in the Gospel (~ chapter 1)
 - 1 b. Refusing Worldly Wisdom (~ chapter 2)
 - 1 c. Renewed in Christ (~ chapter 3)
 - 1 d. Relational Truth (~ chapter 4)

1 B. Last time we were in Colossians, we started the third section of Colossians: Renewed in Christ

1. In the last section, refusing worldly wisdom, Paul told the Colossians what they can't be doing if they are hoping in the gospel: they can't be following worldly wisdom, submitting to things in this world
2. But if they're not to be captured by worldly wisdom, what should they be doing? Paul's described a negative sense of practically living out your hope in the gospel, but how do we positively live out the gospel in our lives?
3. That's what this third section describes: what should the Colossians be devoting themselves to - what does true religion look like, what actions accompany hoping in the gospel?

1 C. As we started this section, we looked at verses 5-11 and saw that the first action of true holiness is to put sin to death

1. And this is because true sanctification is rooted in the gospel - in the gospel we died with Christ so in the gospel we should be dying to sin
2. So we need to be killing Christ-dishonoring hearts - hearts that are in love with the things of this world, we need to be killing Christ-dishonoring relationships - ungracious attitudes and actions towards others, and we need to be killing Christ-dishonoring community - community that isn't built in Christ the truth
3. And our text last week ended with verses 10-11 - we can't lie to one another, we can't base our community on deceit, and then Paul starts to give a reason why we need to have Christ-centered community, not Christ dishonoring community
4. So he says, Colossians 3:9-11 - *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

1 D. As Dan said last Wednesday, and I agree wholeheartedly, these verses seem very abrupt and don't, at first glance, fit well

1. Why in the world does Paul suddenly break into the lack of difference between Greeks and Jews? How does this flow with Paul's purpose of holding up sanctification here in these verses? This seems to come out of nowhere...
2. But I'm convinced that this means we need to work harder to understand Paul's thoughts here - and likely this means that understanding what is going on in these verses will lead us right to the center of Paul's thoughts
3. So, our question this morning is how do we get from "put to death therefore what is earthly in you" to "here there is not Greek and Jew"? And when we figure out the answer to this question, what does this teach us about sanctification?

E. Let's read our passage this morning - I'm going to read starting in verse 5 and continuing through verse 17

1. Our study this morning is going to focus on verses 9-11, but I want to set the verses in context this morning
- 3 1 2. As usual, you can follow along in your Bibles, or I'll have the text up here on the screen

1 F. Proposition: Paul's abrupt introduction of the unity of the gospel really betrays the center of his thought: if we have died and risen with Christ then we have been made a new creation, and our new self is one in Christ in order to exalt Christ.

- 1 1. The Center of Sanctification: Corporate re-creation exalting Christ
- 1 2. The Unity of Sanctification: The exaltation of Christ is seen in radical, otherworldly unity
- 1 3. The Application of Sanctification: Pursuing Christ-exalting, otherworldly unity

1 II. The Center of Sanctification: Corporate re-creation exalting Christ

A. As we start to examine our verses this morning, the first thing I want to notice is that verses 9-11 sit at the junction between the 'Put to death' passage and the 'Put on' passage - the junction between negative and positive sanctification

1. Unless we want to imagine that Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, lost his train of thought and just wandered down an unrelated rabbit trail, then literally these verses are right at the center of sanctification
2. And though verse 11 - *here there is not Greek and Jew* - seems a long way removed from verse 5 - *put to death therefore what is earthly in you* - or even verse 8 - *now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice and obscene talk from your mouth* - there is a connected progression that takes us from verse 9 - *do not lie to one another* - to verse 11
3. And this connected progression leads us to the center of Paul's thoughts on sanctification, which unsurprisingly are going to center on the glorification of Christ - the center of sanctification is Christ's glory
4. So we're going to look at verse 9-11 and see three steps, three things that are at the center of sanctification

1 B. First, re-creation is at the center of sanctification

1. Verse 9 flows naturally from verses 5-8 - we started with heart attitudes that we needed to put to death, then moved toward relational attitudes that we need to put to death, and then finally communal attitudes we need to put to death in verse 9 - our community cannot be based on deceit, that is something that must be put to death
2. And then Paul takes the first step toward verse 11, because in verse 9 he gives a reason - *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices*
 - a. Paul's reason is tied back to what he had been saying at the end of chapter 2 - you died with Christ, you put off the old self, the old self that used to walk in such practices, used to live in such practices, but if you died with Christ, that old self died at the cross
 - b. If your old self died, you can't still live in it - your old self was full of deceit, bound in deceit, lived in deceit, but it died and you don't have to live in deceit anymore (or any of the other earthly attitudes in this passage)
3. And in verse 10, Paul moves to the positive truth, when you put off the old self you also - have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
 - a. Paul's being really strict with his logic here - you didn't just die, because then you would do nothing - sure you wouldn't lie to one another, but that's not Paul's end goal, rather he wants to create the opposite of that condition
 - b. So, you didn't just die, you didn't just put off your old self, you were also raised with Christ - as Paul has already said at the beginning of chapter 3 - and that means you have been re-created, you have been given a new self
4. And this re-creation event, the re-creation that happened at the cross and the empty tomb, is at the center of sanctification
 - a. Sanctification is not about working harder to do the right thing (although it may entail hard work), but hard work isn't the center of sanctification, a re-creation is at the center of sanctification - you were remade in Christ
 - b. The Holy Spirit took the work that Christ did on the cross and applied it to you, so that all that you were died and a new you was created, a new you that isn't in bondage to sin anymore, a new you that doesn't love sin anymore
 - c. Apart from that re-creation, apart from that living union with Christ through the gospel, sanctification is meaningless - you can't work harder to make yourself better, you must be re-created
5. And this re-creation has a specific pattern, a specific image after which it is being created
 - a. Paul says that the new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator - literally, our new self is being remade in the image of Christ, and this only makes sense - if your re-creation happened in the resurrection of Christ, then your re-creation should be in His image
 - b. And this is a glorious truth, a truth Paul is rejoicing in, because Christ is - *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation* - we have been united to glory in Christ, and sanctification flows from that union, from that re-creation, from having the image of the man of earth removed from us and being made in the image of the man from heaven - which leads us to our second point

2 C. Second, a new body is at the center of sanctification

1. If re-creation is at the center of sanctification, then we are being remade into something - something died, something new has come - and we've already seen what that new thing is, it is the image of Christ
2. But every member of Christ is being remade into that one image, we who were once many are now being re-created into one - and that tells us something about this re-creation, this re-creation isn't merely individual, it is corporate
3. And that is what connects verse 10 to verse 11 - in verse 10, Paul holds up re-creation as central to the imperative of sanctification and in verse 11 Paul looks at what this re-creation is
4. So verse 11 starts with a word that is translated 'here' or 'where' or 'in which' - *here there is not Greek and Jew* - which prompts us to ask, "where is Paul talking about?" Where is there not Greek or Jew?"

- 2 5. The answer is in the new creation, in the new creation we are being remade into one body, into one image - we who once were alienated are now united, we who were once hostile are now at peace with each other, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:14 - *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*
- 2 6. And the reason we are now united in one body to each other is because we are being remade in one image in Christ - all of us are resurrected together in Christ, together in one body - if that's true then it is impossible that there would be any real, lasting differences - we're all united into one, we've been re-created together
- 7. In fact this oneness, this unity with each other and with Christ, is the best expression of sanctification - this unity is real sanctification, the other commands are merely marks of sanctification, little truths that flow out of this big truth
- 1 8. So, in some places sanctification is merely spoken of as union, for example, when Christ prays for His church in John 17, His ultimate desire is to see unity, one bodyness, expressed in His church, John 17:10-11, 20-21 - *All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*
- 1 9. Sanctification is centered on a new, unified body in Christ where old practices are put to death and a new community is formed that looks like Christ, a community that stands in contrast to and against the false communities of the world - any so-called sanctification that isn't pursuing unity in Christ isn't sanctification
- 10. And this leads us to our third point:

2D. Third, exalting Christ is at the center of sanctification

- 1. As we go through verse 11 there are four sets of contrasts that don't exist in the new body - and I'm not going to spend a lot of time on the contrasts because I don't think the specific contrasts are that important to Colossians like perhaps they are to Galatians - Paul's just listing a wide range of contrasts that exist in the world that don't exist in the church, even the most extreme contrasts
- 3 1 2. Whether they are differences in ethnicity, differences in religious background, differences in culture, differences in societal status or wealth, none of these differences has any meaning in the church
- 1 3. Where Paul is trying to get to is at the end of verse 11 - all these differences are meaningless and the meaningfulness of these differences serves to highlight something, that *Christ is all, and in all*
- 4. The meaningfulness of these former contrasts serve to show that all have been remade in Christ, nothing had come from them, everything had come from Christ, everything will always come from Christ and His exaltation, His glory is at the center of sanctification - sanctification exists to glorify Christ
- 5. The death of our old selves, our re-creation into one unified body that is being renewed in the image of Christ in holiness and in splendor serves one purpose - to display the image of Christ in this world, to draw attention to Christ's glory
- 6. Ultimately, like all things in the universe, sanctification isn't about us - it may happen in us, but it isn't about us - sanctification is about Christ, about displaying His image and His glory to the world
- 7. And all sanctification needs to be chasing after this goal - any so-called sanctification that seeks to exalt us or isn't focused on exalting Christ isn't sanctification - sanctification exists to exalt Christ

E. So, at the center of sanctification is a corporate re-creation that serves to glorify Christ

- 1. It is against this backdrop that Paul wants us to understand all the exhortations of verses 5-17
- 2. We put to death sin in a corporate context by calling each other to remember our re-creation in Christ and calling each other to live for the glory of Christ
- 3. We put on Christ's image in a corporate context by calling each other to remember our re-creation in Christ and calling each other to live for the glory of Christ
- 4. And this is why Paul's exhortations move from personal exhortations in verse 5 to corporate exhortations by verse 10 and almost all of his positive exhortations are corporate exhortations
- 5. Sanctification happens in community that exalts Christ

1 III. The Unity of Sanctification: The exaltation of Christ is seen in radical, otherworldly unity

A. For our second point this morning, then, I want to consider what Colossians 3:11 is teaching us

1. If Paul moves toward the unity of verse 11 at the center of his teaching on sanctification, what does that call us to?
2. And I think that verse 11 is teaching us that the church should pursue radical, otherworldly unity in order to glorify Christ - this is the heart of sanctification and this is the arena in which sanctification happens

1 B. First, sanctification is always expressed in radical, otherworldly unity

- 2 1. This is Paul's point at the beginning of verse 11 - all the differences that mean something to the world don't mean anything to the church - In Christ's body, those who were once enemies are now united in one pursuit
2. And this truth is taught all across the New Testament - the new body of Christ brings a radical new unity
 - 1 a. Romans 10:12 - *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*
 - 1 b. Romans 12:4-5 - *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*
 - 1 c. I Corinthians 10:16-17 - *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*
 - 1 d. I Corinthians 12:12-13 - *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*
 - 1 e. Galatians 3:26-29 - *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*
 - 1 f. Ephesians 2:14-16 - *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*
 - 1 g. Ephesians 3:6 - *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*
 - 1 h. Ephesians 4:3-6 - *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*
- 1 3. Therefore as members of Christ's new body, as those who have died and risen with Christ, we should pursue radical, otherworldly unity - this is what Christ saved us for, to make us one, this is what He prayed for us
 - a. And Paul applies that to us and says - all the old divisions that mattered when you were part of the world don't matter anymore, they need to be set aside, and we need to be actively working to live out that truth
 - b. This verse would have been a radical statement in Colossae - perhaps our world isn't polarized along the same lines anymore, but maybe we could paraphrase the verse to help us understand, it's like Paul came and told us: here there is not Black or White, Republican or Democrat, Mexican, Arab, wealthy, poor, but Christ is all and in all
 - c. Now I'm not saying that we need to retranslate the verse that way, that these categories are direct matches, but that thought experiment should help us understand how radical this new unity is and this is the new unity that we need to pursue as part of sanctification - the things that the world divides over are meaningless in Christ
 - d. If we are raised with Christ then we must pursue an otherworldly unity that can only happen in Christ

2 C. Second, this radical, otherworldly unity is expressed in the church, and practically in local churches

1. If radical, otherworldly unity is a primary goal of sanctification, then it can't be merely a theoretical goal - it must be lived out somewhere - and Paul would say this is the church
 - a. Now, I can't touch words in verse 11 that say this, but we need to set this in the context of Colossians
 - 1 2 b. In verse 10, Paul reminds them that they are being re-created in one body after one image, and what is this one body, where is this unity found? This calls us back to chapter 1 - *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,*
 - 2 c. They have been raised into Christ's body, the church and Paul says that it is in the church that God is displaying this mystery of radical unity - *for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

- 1.2. So it is in the church that this radical unity ought to be displayed, the church should stand against the world and show a different image - not the image of division brought about by sin, but the image of radical unity brought about by redemption and re-creation
3. But I want to go one step farther because I don't want to leave this in the theoretical 'universal' church - this unity needs to be practical, so it needs to be displayed in individual local churches
 - a. Again, I can't touch specific words in verse 11 to show this, but the context of Colossians would call us to this
 - 2.b. Remember in Colossians 2 that Paul's struggle for the Colossians was to see them knit together in love - that is that local churches would be bound together in the love of Christ - *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love,*
 - 2.c. And at the end of Colossians 2, Paul contrasts the false wisdom of this world with his goal for the Colossians, to see them grow up into Christ through local churches, the joints and ligaments of Christ's body - *and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*
 - 1.d. And in the context of Colossians 3, Paul surrounds this truth with commands to the local church - do not lie to one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, put on love to bind yourselves together, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body, teach and admonish one another
 - e. These are all practical commands that are lived out in the context of local churches, and Paul wants to see the unity of the gospel lived out in local churches as well
4. So as members of Christ's body we need to pursue radical unity in Christ and the way we do that is by pursuing radical unity in local churches, small representations of the body of Christ where we can display to the world that we are different, we have been re-created by Christ

2.D. Third, otherworldly unity is how we display Christ's glory to this world

1. Verse 11 ends by saying - *but Christ is all, and in all*
2. This is the purpose of radical, otherworldly unity - when Christ comes in and re-creates us, taking the sin that led to division and dissension to death and remaking us in His image together in one body, He displays His glory
3. The world ought to be able to look into the church and ask, "why are these people who should be enemies sharing life together? Eating together? Singing together? Praying together? What is holding these people together?"
4. The world ought to look into the church and after looking should come to the conclusion - the only thing that holds this disparate group of people together is Christ - that is literally the only thing they all have in common and the only way this group of people could hold together is if some supernatural power is dwelling within them
5. When we do that, when we display that to the world, we show that Christ is worth more than any other thing in this world, that Christ is worth more than whatever might naturally divide us in this world, that Christ is worth more than whatever our goals, our pursuits, our hobbies, our desires, our histories, our passions, our understandings are - Christ is worth so much that we can set these things aside and love those who don't share anything in common with us except their pursuit of Christ
6. The more the church is made up of radically different people pursuing Christ together, the more we show that the only thing we are pursuing is Christ - everything else doesn't matter - it doesn't matter if we are different ethnicities, come from different cultures, have different pursuits, have different political positions, have different professions because all those things are such small matters, and all we really care about is Christ
7. The more we pursue radical, otherworldly unity the more we glorify Christ, the more we display Christ's glory to the world - we ought to love radical unity and pursue radical unity because in doing so we are displaying Christ's glory

1 IV. The Application of Sanctification: Pursuing Christ-exalting, otherworldly unity

A. If pursuing radical, otherworldly unity in the church ought to be our pursuit, what does that mean for our local church

1. How should we apply these verses in our context? What things should we be pursuing? How do we through our actions display that Christ is all and in all?
2. And I want to split this up into two concepts - how do we pursue this individually and how do we pursue this corporately?

1 B. Pursuing Christ-exalting, otherworldly unity individually

1. There are so many ways to apply these verses individually as believers - our lives should be marked by reaching out to those who are different than us, befriending those who we wouldn't naturally befriend, pursuing those who we wouldn't naturally pursue in the name of Christ and for the gospel - but I think the ultimate way we pursue Christ-exalting otherworldly unity as individuals is by throwing ourselves into local churches
2. We should prioritize our relationship with a local church because it is in that local church that we can live out this unity
 - a. In local churches we gather with all those who claim the name of Christ and pursue Christ together
 - b. We join together on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings and share life together in order to pursue Christ - and as we join together with all who have joined themselves with Christ to pursue Christ we show the world how precious Christ is to us
 - c. So we ought to throw ourselves into our local church, to prioritize these relationships, our primary fellowship, our deepest friendships, the place where we share ourselves the most should be the local church
3. And, in contrast, we should be careful not to prioritize other types of fellowship
 - a. In our world the local church is often getting a bad rap - too old fashioned, I don't feel fulfilled there, I feel more ministered to in other things, I can meet God in my own way - and because of that other types of Christian groups have multiplied, other ways to have fellowship with Christians outside of church are everywhere
 - b. And, in one way, this is a really good thing - I'm glad that there are Christian sports teams and Christian homeschool groups and Christian youth groups and college campus ministries and all sorts of other groups, but we need to be careful that we don't start to replace the local church with these things
 - c. A Christian sports team, homeschool group, musical group, youth group, college group, etc. may be a type of Christian fellowship, but they are not the ultimate type of Christian fellowship
 - d. Now I want to be very clear, I'm not saying these things are wrong, or even that they aren't good but they do need to be put in their proper position because in groups other than the local church we are pursuing something else in addition to Christ, something else is binding us together, we are coming together because we all homeschool, because we all love this sport, because we are all college students - and that's fine, but it's not ultimate - our primary Christian fellowship shouldn't be in homogenous groups pursuing something in addition to Christ, our primary Christian fellowship, our primary Christian community should be in the local church
 - e. The problem comes when we start sacrificing time in or priority of fellowship with our local church to spend time with these other types of Christian fellowship, because we are, perhaps accidentally, but we are subtly stating that maybe something else is more important than Christ, something else binds us closer together - maybe Christ isn't all and in all, maybe we need something else to hold us together
4. So our primary fellowship, our deepest friendships, and our first priority should be the fellowship of the local church, because that action states to our families, to our fellow church members and to the world that Christ is the most important and Christ is who I am pursuing - I'm going to join myself with people even those who aren't like me to pursue Christ together because Christ is all that we need to join us together

1 C. Pursuing Christ-exalting, otherworldly unity corporately

1. If living this out individually means we need to pursue local churches where everyone who is in Christ fellowships together, then corporately this means that we need to take care to make sure that our local churches aren't focused on anything besides Christ
 - a. Another common trend in our culture today is to plant churches that are demographically oriented - the classic version of this is the 'cowboy' church or the 'hipster' church, although sometimes this trend can be more subtle
 - b. Basically this vision of the church looks for ways to draw people together, how can we design a church to draw in a specific cultural group? If we can get a church that's focused on something else then that church is going to stick together better and be better able to recruit out of that demographic.
 - c. But, as I look at Colossians 3:11, I would have to say that this is a dangerous pursuit, one that isn't exalting Christ
 - d. We shouldn't have churches that are based in anything other than Christ, we shouldn't aim to have churches that are homogenous in any way except pursuing Christ together
 - e. That means we shouldn't have churches that are oriented toward a profession, or a lifestyle, or a demographic, or a pursuit - we shouldn't have farming churches, or homeschooling churches, or black churches or white churches, we should have churches
 - f. Now, I'll admit that sometimes these things can get a little complicated both by trying to decide what things are necessary to pursuing Christ and what things are merely innocuous lifestyles and also they can get complicated by history or even by location, but we shouldn't aim to make our churches homogenous around these things and we should be actively aiming the other direction
 - g. So, as a church, we should strive not to let anything besides Christ and what is necessary to follow Him together define our church and if we see that there are starting to be other things that even accidentally define our church we should actively pursue those who are different than us in these areas
2. We should aim to make Christ the only center of our church - we should want others to look into our midst and ask, "what draws them together?" and to be baffled - they should agree that it is only Christ that draws us together, that Christ is all and He is in all, so that we can respond, "Yes! And here's why He draws us together - He is the image of... and pursuing His glory is drawing all of us together"