

Keeping, Killing & Casting Off

Colossians

By Jay Smith

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Bible Text: Colossians 3:1-11

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Corron Elementary School

455 Thornwood Way

South Elgin, IL 60177

Website: www.gracecovenantchurch.net

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gcchurch

Have you ever noticed that couples seem to look like one another over time? Is there really something to that? Could that be physically true? Is it just anecdotal? Well, there's actually a scientific term for this, it's called convergence of appearance. A researcher named Robert Zajonc at the University of Michigan conducted a facial likeness study in 1987. He had a team of volunteers and they looked at various photographs of people, men and women, and they were asked to match them up, "Which of these two do you think are couples? Are married to one another?" And perhaps not surprisingly, they found that people correctly selected the married couples overwhelmingly when they had been married for 25 years or more. We really begin to look like each other and my sincere condolences to the wives, but that is the case. You're probably improving your husband's appearance as you begin to look like one another.

So why is that? Why do we begin to look like each other? Well, we become like who we spend time with, unconsciously imitating them, little mannerisms and speech patterns. We also share the same life experiences and even facial expressions and over time it shows. So who are you becoming more like? What is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm. We become like Christ as we spend time with him through his word and prayer. The Apostle Paul says, "We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit."

There is a negative side described in the Bible of this principle as well, describing idolaters. In Psalm 135 it says, "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths." And here's the principle, "Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them." There is a principle at work: we become like what we treasure. It will show on your face and it will show in your soul.

This morning, we'll look at Colossians 3:1-11 and, God willing, we'll allow the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul to exhort us to treasure our Lord Jesus Christ and become

like him by setting our ambitions and our affections in heaven; becoming so heavenly minded that we are able to be of earthly good. As you may recall, we've been journeying through Paul's letter to the believers at Colossae and we're in a section now that's filled with various commands, the do's and don'ts, if you will. And that kind of a section in the Scripture can confuse us and make us think that we are somehow earning or keeping our salvation through our work and that is spiritually deadly.

The book of Colossians reminds us of the glory and sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for our sins. We are not self-made men and women, nor are we self-saved. In chapter 1, the Apostle Paul declares, "In him," in Christ, "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Our salvation is wholly the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and not our own, but we do have a role to play. Paul exhorts us in Colossians 2:6, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him."

As we have worked through our previous studies, we have looked at Paul's extensive description of what it means to be in Christ and our union with the Lord Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Well, today, we'll consider again the fact of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ and we'll see how that both enables and requires us to keep our minds on heavenly things; to kill competing desires; and to cast off anger and deceit.

Please stand and look at Colossians 3:1-11 while I read this.

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 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.

You may be seated.

So first we'll consider keeping your mind on heavenly realities. Paul says, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." And you'll notice it starts with the word "if"; it could really be also translated "since" and some translations translate it that way. There is a parallel to a verse we looked at last time in Colossians 2:20, "If," or since, "since you died with Christ to the

elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations?" These are the human regulations that were prevalent in the church in Colossae from the false teachers. Paul is saying, "Since you died, you have no reason to follow those rules and regulations," and very similarly here in Colossians 3, "Since you've been raised with Christ, here's how you should be. Seek the things above, set your minds on the things above." It's on the basis of what is true of you in Christ. You'll notice the word "seek" appears twice in this little passage and the idea of seeking here is not so much to gain something you don't have, but rather to long for what is already yours. The goal, what we're seeking, what we're after, changes us.

Paul lived in light of his own destiny and you can hear a little bit of tension between who he is in Christ and who he wants to become. He says in Philippians 3:12-14, after speaking of Christ and the power of his resurrection, he says, "I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." You see, on the basis of who he is in Christ, he's pressing on. He's seeking. He says, "Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." He was seeking, he was setting his mind on things above and he notes here where Christ is, and just stopping at that one little point, note that it is where Christ is right now, this morning. Our Lord Jesus Christ is not a "was," an historical figure, a note in a history book; he's not a concept or a theoretical ideal. The Lord Jesus Christ is alive today right now in heaven at the right hand of God.

And notice it says also that he is seated at the right hand of God. This is an allusion to Psalm 110:1. You may recall some months ago we looked at this verse together. "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" And this verse is the most commonly quoted or alluded to verse from the Old Testament in the New Testament, and the Lord Jesus himself before the Pharisees when they were trying to decide to put him to death, he quoted this verse from Psalm 110 saying, "From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven."

We are to seek the things that are above, set our minds on the things that are above. I was thinking about that a little bit and I wondered, "Well, what things?" and I think my mind went in a little too literal of a direction; I was thinking at what objects are we to seek above. And as I dug into it, I understood literally it says, "The above seek, the above think." So the word "things" has just been added to make it into a reasonable English sentence. What we are to seek are the matters of heaven or, if you will, what really matters in heaven. Would that change what you think about what you're concerned about, what things your mind dwells upon if you consider, "Does this matter in heaven?" The red light that stops you from going on your way doesn't really matter in heaven but your attitude toward it does.

The things that matter above, set your minds on the things above, not on the things of the earth. The Lord Jesus warned in his parable about the seeds in the soil, that the seed could be cast upon the soil but the cares of this world grow up and choke out the word and it is not fruitful. We are to seek the things that are above, not the things that are on the earth.

We sometimes sing a song, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus." You remember it says,

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace."

So it's by meditating on the identity, the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ, the seeking of the things above, that directs our minds to those things and not to the things of this earth.

So why are we to do this? I mean, it may seem obvious but Paul explains here for each of these various kinds of commands, he explains what the reason is or what the rationale is. In verses 3 and 4, Paul says, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." So you have died and you may say, "Well, I sort of feel alive. Aren't I here and alive?" and yet we know from the Scriptures that the reality is we have died with Christ. Colossians 2 tells us that. We have died to sin. We have died to the law. We have died to the elementary spirits of the world and we have died with Christ. We are identified with him.

So one of the reasons why we are to set our minds on the things above is because as far as this world is concerned, we have already died, and further it says that our life is hidden with Christ in God. As we consider that, note that our life is hidden with Christ. Perhaps you remember playing hide and seek as a child and sometimes it was fun to hide with another person and just the two of you would be there hidden away waiting, "Are they going to find us? Are we going to get away with it?" and we have this intimacy with our Lord Jesus Christ. We are hidden with him. Hidden with Christ in God and he is the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, again, Colossians 2 tells us.

We are also hidden from the world and even from ourselves. 1 John tells us, "Beloved, we are God's children now and what we shall be, what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is." No one knows our true identity. We have the ultimate disguise, if you will; we are undercover agents in this world. It is not obvious that we serve the King of glory and yet we are his servants. We are hidden with Christ in God, and in another sense, we are hidden and we are safe. We are hidden away. Psalm 27:5 says, "He will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent. He will lift me high upon a rock." So it's a common theme in the Scriptures of being hidden by God and being safe, protected.

Verse 4 says, "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." We have been hidden with him and we will be revealed with him. And thinking of that appearance with him in glory, the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3, "Our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will

transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that he has even to subject all things to himself." You have a future in glory. A commentator from a century or more ago, J. B. Lightfoot, meditated on this and said, "The veil that now shrouds your higher life from others and even partly from yourselves, will then be withdrawn. The world which persecutes, despises, ignores now, will then be blinded with the dazzling glory of the revelation." Isn't that amazing? "When Christ who is our life appears, then we also will appear with him in glory, when he comes to be glorified, as the Scripture says, in his saints."

This is a wonderful counter to a problem I often experience. Perhaps you can identify. I tend to think things will always be the way they are right now and perhaps you're a young mom and you're facing another dirty diaper and you're wondering, "Will it ever end? Will I be doing diapers forever until the Lord comes?" Or perhaps it's a mountain of laundry that you're facing or a cranky boss and yet, if nothing else, the Scriptures encourage us that things will not always be the same. You have a glorious future in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is reason for hope.

So perhaps you're saying, "Okay, I'm convinced. I need to keep my mind on heavenly realities. How do I do that?" So a few suggestions, first, understand that you can take charge of your thoughts. You are not a victim of whatever comes into your mind. You have the ability through the Holy Spirit to control your thoughts. Long ago, I was studying Philippians 4:8 which has exhortation from the Apostle Paul about what to think about and it illustrates this principle. You can control what you're to think about and I put together this helpful, handy acronym, THRPLGREAW, it's catchy. This is from the New American Standard which I read back in those days, THRPLGREAW: "whatever is True, whatever is Honorable, whatever is Right, whatever is Pure, whatever is Lovely, whatever is of Good Repute, if there is any Excellence and Anything Worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." Again, we have the ability to control what goes on in our mind. There are trains of thought and you can redirect the destination of those trains of thought.

Secondly, meditate on the reality of your identity in Christ. I mentioned several weeks ago you are not your resume. You are not your accomplishments. You are not defined by your sins and if you are saints, you are not your own. You were bought with a price. You've been united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection and you will be glorified.

And third, memorize and meditate on God's promises. Those will direct our thoughts to what is true, to heavenly realities and in verse 4, we have one of those, "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." On the darkest day, you still have that hope. Paul mentions in chapter 1, verse 27 of this letter to the Colossians that Christ is our hope of glory.

But after saying all that, I must ask: are you in Christ? Is this true of you? Have you been raised with Christ so that you are able to seek the things above and set your minds on the things above? Have you trusted fully and solely in the finished work of our Lord Jesus

Christ and not in your own righteousness for salvation? If that is true, you are in Christ and these promises are yours. If you've not done that, if you're still trying to make sure that your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, you're in spiritual peril. The Bible says that if you're trying to make your own way to heaven, to please God on your own efforts, you will in fact go to hell and suffer forever. Repent of that. Turn from all reliance on yourself and your obedience and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and then you'll truly be able to seek the things that are above and set your mind on the things above.

Our second section in this text is: killing competing desires. Colossians 3:5-7, Paul says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." We've looked at meditating on what is heavenly, here Paul says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them." Now, the focus here is on coveting and its outcome which, as it is fully expressed, leads all the way to sexual immorality. These are barriers to loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

We saw in the Scripture readings this morning and even in our call to worship that we're to love God fully and we know that a summary of the law is "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength, and your neighbor as yourself," and we'll see in these two remaining sections a focus on each of those two major areas. Romans 8:4 tells us that part of the purpose of our redemption was "in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." God is actually working in us all those things that were required in the law, but not through our own effort, through his Spirit, and we'll see how this plays out.

But first, we're struck with this expression, "put to death." I mean, this is quite violent and dramatic. "Put to death what is earthly in you." And perhaps you think when you hear this phrase, "put to death," of the authority of a human government to execute criminals, and I think that's a good analogy for ourselves, and perhaps God created human government as an illustration for us for how we should operate within ourselves. You are in charge of a government no matter how old or how young you are. You may say, "No one told me that." You are in charge of the government of yourself, not to the exclusion of God, but God calls you to manage and steward yourself, and one of the things that you must do as a good and righteous government of yourself, is to put certain things to death. You must not negotiate with terrorists and you have, dear one, a terrorist living inside you. You have a body of sin that says to you, "You'd better sin. If you don't sin in this way, there's going to be some consequences. I'm telling you, you'd better sin." If you negotiate with your inner terrorist, you will lose that battle and dishonor God, but in fact, if you with the Holy Spirit's help put to death the terrorist, put to death the earthly things within you, then you will begin to walk in victory.

Now, there is an already and not yet tension that we see even in this set of commands. We looked at the earlier section and it clearly said you have died. That's one of the reasons you're to seek the things above and set your mind on the things above, because you died and now it says you have to put something else to death. Again, this is part of

the "already and not yet." As we saw in Romans 6, we are to consider ourselves dead to sin. Sin doesn't have dominion over us and yet we're responsible to not sin. I think it's helpful to think of it this way: we have been freed from the penalty of sin. Again, Romans 6 tells us that we have been freed from the power of sin. We are now being freed from the practice of sin and, praise God, in the future we will be freed from the very presence of sin. So, again, there is an "already and not yet." Sin doesn't have dominion over you and yet you're responsible to not sin.

Well, we see before us in verse 5 this list of various vices or sins and this list has a flow to it. You can see how it starts with, in a sense, the fruit, the outward expression of sin back to the root, the initial cause of it, and in our waging of war against sin, we have to kill the root. In this case, it's very clear that the root is covetousness, a desire for something other than God. It's a violation of that commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your strength; not to love anything else more than God. "Covetous" literally means "more." To want more, more, more. Again, ultimately it is idolatry, worshiping something other than God.

You know, our desires for things are evidence themselves of brokenness so we can want various things, but left to ourselves over time, we will begin to desire wrong things. So if you read this list backwards, trace it through from the root out to the fruit, you'll see a progression. So it begins with covetousness, wanting things. Wanting things leads to evil desires, a desire for things we shouldn't have, the things that God forbids. Those evil desires lead to passion or in some translations, lust. That can become a consuming desire. Not just, "I want something wrong, I really want it and I've got to have it!"

So covetousness leads to wrong desires; wrong desires lead to passion; passion is expressed first in impurity, it kind of oozes out through the edges; and ultimately in sexual immorality. Sin always starts at the root and we know that no failure is a first event. From time to time tragically, we'll hear about pastors who have failed in sexual immorality in some spectacular and egregious way, and we intuitively know but don't always kind of think through that didn't just happen. That pastor, that man of God or someone who, at least, pretended to be a man of God, didn't just decide, "You know, I think I will trash my ministry, ruin my marriage, cause discredit upon the name of Christ for a few moments of pleasure. I think that's a good trade." No one would decide that. That was the end of a long road of uncontrolled desire; of giving in, if you will, negotiating to that inner terrorist step by step. An evil desire leading to a passion, a consuming desire, impurity and then sexual immorality.

You may notice in the Scriptures that sexual immorality, the commands to flee it, to avoid it, are very prominent. Why is that? And perhaps you have a non-Christian friend who might even say to you, "Why are you guys all hung up about sexual immorality? What's the big deal anyway?" If we look at a very similar passage in Ephesians 5, we'll see evidence of this. He says, "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

So, again, why is this so important? Well, let me explain it in terms of a picture of the Gospel. Consider the Gospel this way: the Father in eternity past, chose a bride for his Son, the bride composed of redeemed sinners across time. The Son gave himself to redeem his bride, sacrificing himself, and the Father and the Son have given the Holy Spirit as a pledge, a seal, an engagement ring, if you will, to his bride. The Son will come and retrieve his bride and bring her to be with him forever. If you are in Christ, you are swept up into this supernatural romance and I believe God is painting a picture in us of Christ and the church. And we heard yesterday at the wedding, a beautiful ceremony, from Ephesians 5, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." So there is something in God's design even for our bodies and the one flesh union that helps paint the picture of the Gospel.

Now, you can preserve this Gospel picture regardless of your marital status. If you are unmarried, you preserve this Gospel picture through your patient celibacy, not accepting some kind of cheap substitute or something that will mar the picture. If you're married, you preserve it through your persevering monogamy. We're to pursue God's glorification, not selfish gratification. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 tells us, "this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality." Sexual immorality, in a sense, is an anti-Gospel. It dishonors God's design and mars the picture that he has designed into humanity of one man, one woman, committed just like Christ and his bride, the church. So even currently, there is obviously great concern over homosexual marriage, but homosexual marriage, in and of itself, is not ultimately the issue, it's homosexual acts and all acts of sexual immorality in all forms, and ultimately we know, even from this passage, that those are all evidence of covetousness and idolatry, worshiping something else, someone else, other than the Lord Jesus Christ and God.

Now, we uphold both the seriousness of sexual sin and our concern and grave warning to those involved in it, warning them that, as the Scripture says, they will not inherit the kingdom of God. And at the same time, we uphold the offer of the Gospel, the free offer of, "whosoever will may come." All those who repent of their own self-will, of their own trusting in their own righteousness, of comfort in their own sin. All who repent of those and trust solely in the Lord Jesus Christ are welcomed into God's family. We uphold both of those.

Now, the reasons, the rationale, it may almost seem like it's not worth mentioning but Paul gives two reasons in verses 6 and 7. He says in verse 6, "On account of these the wrath of God is coming." And we know that we are no longer children of wrath, so it is entirely inappropriate for us to engage in any behavior that would draw the wrath of God upon ourselves. In verse 7, "In these you too once walked, when you were living in them." You were once enslaved to sin. You've been set free. Don't enslave yourself again.

Well, how do we kill competing desires? How do we kill these things at the root? We know this expression, "put to death," is not particularly common in the New Testament. There is one other passage that has a very similar expression in it and I think it gives us a

good clue. In Romans 8:13 it says, "if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." This is not something we can do entirely on our own, we need supernatural help.

Well, what are those spiritual weapons that we can use to put to death what is earthly in us? We have weapons. Ephesians 6 describes them. The sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And Ephesians 6:18, "praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication." The sword of the Spirit, the word of God, is a weapon that we can use to put to death what is earthly in us. You may recall that Jesus said, "If your right hand causes you to stumble, then cut it off. If your eye is a problem, gouge it out." But we know the problem is deeper than that. There is no knife, there is no sword, that can quite cut to the root of the problem except the word of God which Hebrews tells us is "sharper than any two-edged sword and able to pierce in and judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Even our motives are exposed to the sword of the Spirit.

So we need to take that weapon of the sword of the Spirit and turn it on our own sin, again, to turn it on our own internal terrorist and put them to death. One of the ways that we do that is to memorize and meditate on God's promises, very similar to what I mentioned in the first section. We can also call for help. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us to conquer sin. There is one particular thing that I think you should ask for that is of inestimable value in conquering these sins, in conquering covetousness. Now, perhaps you have a child or you remember being a child and saying at one time, "I just want this one thing. If I have this toy, I promise I'll never want anything else." And as a wise parent, you probably know, "Well, that will last for about ten minutes and then you will want something else." But there is something we can ask of God: we can ask the Holy Spirit to give us something that will enable us to genuinely not want anything else. Can you guess what that might be? It is contentment. Godliness is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us contentment, that will help us to battle against covetousness, against the desire for more, always wanting more.

Now, there is a danger of pride when we talk about the sin of sexual immorality. You may say, "Well, I'm glad that he's speaking on that this morning. I'm sure someone needs to hear that, but that is not an issue for me and so I'll think about something else for a few minutes and then maybe it'll become relevant again." Beware of spiritual pride in this area. The dangers can be very subtle. Perhaps you're not, and I pray and assume that you are not, actively involved in sexual immorality and yet are you vicariously enjoying someone else's sexual immorality through what you read, through what you listen to, through what you watch? Are you cheering on as other people on a screen somewhere act out sexual immorality? Are you drawn into stories of romance that aren't godly? That don't reflect the right Gospel pattern of waiting, celebrating a committed marriage relationship, husband and wife? There is a danger of falling into a subtle trap of spiritual pride and not seeing the danger that we're in.

Now, there are some ways, practical ways that we can help one another, particularly men and women. And if you've been married, you know it's no secret that we're very different

from one another and sometimes we can give off signals that we don't intend to give of that can be confusing at best, and disastrous at worst, to the opposite sex. So let me speak to the men first. Men, you need to be careful about communicating or miscommunicating an exclusive interest in a woman. We tend to do this, men, primarily through our words. You can say something that you think is just a compliment, an offhand comment, but it can be construed and seen as an interest, an exclusive interest in one particular woman. So, men, if you're married, the only woman who needs to hear she looks great today is your wife. And if you're not married, you need to be very careful about that kind of comment, and I know sometimes the ladies will perhaps receive a compliment like that and just kind of be a little confused and maybe ask another one of the girls, "Did he say you look nice too? Did he give you that same compliment?" What they are potentially confused about is, "Are you trying to be exclusive with me?" and that could lead to something that is unsavory.

So men, again, we need to be careful about accidentally communicating an exclusive interest. For women, the issue is opposite in some sense, as you might expect. Women don't need to be as careful about being exclusive as they need to be careful about seeming inclusive, and this happens primarily through dress. That's why we emphasize modesty from time to time. Women can inadvertently communicate through what they wear that they're available to all men; that they're not exclusively reserved just for their husband. So, ladies, please keep in mind that you're preserving this Gospel picture of being reserved for one husband, just as the church is reserved for her Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's very easy for us to send these signals without even understanding what we're doing.

Now, a final thought just in this realm of sexual immorality and practical helps, some things I call guardrails. Guardrails are very helpful, but if you're determined to drive over the cliff, the guardrail will not stop you. So what are some examples of guardrails? Accountability is an example of a guardrail and internet filtering. Many of you have been to my house and many of you have used various devices at our house. You can bring your phone, you can bring your tablet, you can bring your laptop, if you can haul it over and it connects to the internet, you're free to use our network, but every packet that flows through our home is filtered and if you're concerned about your house and all the devices that are connected and communicating and what are people looking at inside my home, then several of us are aware of how this works and can help you set up or purchase the equipment to filter all of the internet traffic in your home. Again, a guardrail. It's helpful, but if someone is determined to drive off the cliff, it won't stop them.

Alright, let's turn to the third section in this passage, Colossians 3:8-11, casting off anger and deceit. Paul says here in contrast to the person that you were, you used to walk in these sins, "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 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." Here we have a different focus. These are relational sins, sins that have much to do with speech

and these are barriers to loving one another. Again, remember that God is working in us the righteous requirement of the law, and that second requirement summarizing the whole law was loving your neighbor as yourself. These are barriers to that.

There are things we must put away, but it's not quite as violent and striking an image as the "put to death" image that we looked at a few minutes ago. So be careful not to think of this in a put away sense like, "Oh, well, I have this anger sweater. I'm going to fold it up and I'm going to put it away and sometime later, I'll open the drawer and get my little anger sweater back out." No, this is more like some piece of clothing that's ruined and it goes to the trash. You're done with it forever, not something you put away and maybe I can slide that thing out when I need it.

Alright, there's a principle at work. Jesus told us out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, so the problem is not your lips, your tongue, your throat. That's not the problem, the problem is way deeper than that. Well, let's look briefly at these various words and kind of understand what's happening. Things we are to put away: anger. This comes originally from a word used of plants that grow and kind of swell up like a piece of fruit as it gets lots of juice in it. Anger can kind of build, build. And then wrath is more of an active, an outburst. It's like that thing, boom! popped open and all that stuff that was inside came out. Now, anger and wrath are righteous in God, but in us, not so much.

We're to put away anger, wrath, malice and inward viciousness of disposition. You feel malice toward someone, as one of the statements in our country, with malice toward none. You know, we should have that standard in the church, with malice toward none.

Then slander and the word literally is "blasphemy." So it's a little bit of a head scratcher, "Huh, blasphemy and slander, I don't usually think of those as being the same thing." Well, if we look at James 3, I think we'll begin to see how these fit together. James 3:8-9, speaking of sins of speech. He says, "no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the image of God." So slanderous speech directed toward God we call blasphemy. That same speech directed toward another person is slander.

Finally, a thing that we're to put off: obscene talk, also translated abusive speech. This is just extremely hateful speech that, at least in days gone by, would be kind of bleeped out of a television program. They wouldn't broadcast these words. We're to put off all of those things.

And he says in verse 9, "Do not lie to one another." Now, why are we tempted to lie? We have been given the truth, we say we're all about truth, and yet from time to time, probably more often than we would like to admit, we don't tell the truth. We may be trying to make ourselves look better. We may be trying to avoid blame or embarrassment. And really in all cases, when we lie, we're manifesting that we fear people and what they think more than we fear God. So we're kind of back again to where we started in terms of loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Having no idols. Not loving anything more than God, even other people's opinion.

Paul spends more time in this section on the rationale, the reasons why in verses 9 through 11. "Do not lie to one another," and all the other things, "seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices." You are a new creation so do away with these things. You are being remodeled, in a sense. Your new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. As soon as we hear that image/Creator phrase, that should remind us of Genesis. God created man in his image. Earlier in the book of Colossians, Paul told us that Christ is the image of the invisible God. Creation, a re-creation. Romans 8:29 tells us, "For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

You're also part of the collective body of Christ. He says in verse 11, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." Now, there's a connection here between his command not to lie and his mentioning that there's none of these divisions in the body of Christ. Lying divides us, the truth unifies us. If you tell someone a lie, if you say something that's not true, you're indicating, "Well, I care so little about you that I don't want to tell you the truth, and I have the truth, you have the untruth, there's automatically a division, a distance between us." Ephesians 4, "Having put away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbor for we are members one of another." All of our cultural barriers are dissolved in Christ and they are, or they should be, in the church as well. We are grateful for the sampling of diversity that we have in this church and we pray for more as an indication, an illustration of what God is doing in drawing men and women from every tribe, tongue, people and nation into his church.

He mentions some of the divisions that were present or potentially present in Colossae. Greek and Jew. The Jews often divided the world into those two big categories: those who were of Jewish descent and all the other people who primarily spoke Greek. This was even an issue in the early church. In Acts 6 you may recall that there was a dispute about the distribution of food to the widows and it was between the native Judeans and the Greek speaking Jews. This is a cultural difference.

Circumcised and uncircumcised. This is a religious background different: those who had grown up following the Jewish laws and those who were outside.

Then he speaks of barbarians and Scythians. Who are those people? Well, the Greeks were quite proud of their culture and their language and it was dominant in the area, you may recall, because of Alexander the Great spreading Greek language and culture throughout that region. The people who didn't speak Greek, the Greeks invented a little word, an onomatopoeia, it sounds like what it's talking about. They invented this little word to describe the people whose language they could not understand so when they heard someone speaking who was not speaking Greek, it sounded like barr, barr, barr, barr, so they called them barbarians. That was the word from the Greeks and imagine in a church gathering together, this diverse group of people that the Lord has called to himself. There were some of the cultured Greeks and there are some of the barbarians who don't speak Greek very well or at all.

He mentions the Scythians. Who are those guys? They were regarded as the worst of the barbarians, just brutal people you wouldn't want to have anything to do with. They had a reputation for killing their victims and drinking their blood out of a bowl they made out of their skull. Alright, some of those people were getting saved and drawn into the church. Now, how would they have felt about the Scythians coming into the church? Might they have been a little uneasy? "Do we want to have those people in our church, our nice little church? Not so sure." How would you feel about having some Scythians join Grace Covenant Church? Well, let me tell you, they're here right now because the Scythians were from a region to the north of Colossae. They lived between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea in an area that was bounded on the north by the Caucasus Mountains and so all of us who are labeled as Caucasian find our ancestry in this area where the Scythians were from. Isn't God's grace marvelous?

And finally he speaks of slave and free, no division in your economic status. We're all one. We're all equal in Christ.

So briefly, how do we cast off anger and deceit? We deal with things promptly and directly. We'll reaffirm this during our communion service in just a few minutes. Next week, we'll talk about bearing one another and forgiving one another, Lord willing. Now, in terms of speech, I just want to mention my favorite Proverb that deals with all kinds of speech issues. Proverbs 17:28, "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise, When he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent." So I'll tell you, you can raise your IQ just by shutting it. We should always stop and consider, sort of like the railroad track, you know, stop, look and listen. When we're about to say something, we should keep in mind, "Is this going to be edifying? Is this going to be helpful? Am I venting something, some malice or slander that doesn't need to be coming out of my mouth?"

What about lying? I think the best antidote to lying is confessing the sin of lying. And I don't know about you, but there is something that is so incredibly embarrassing about going to someone, maybe even a spouse, and saying, "I didn't tell you the truth. I lied." And that's so painful and it should be, that it should drive us to just keep life simple, always tell the truth. So if you drive a stake in the ground and you say, "If I ever tell a lie or perhaps realistically, when I tell a lie, I'm committing to going back to that person and confessing it," then the pain of that experience, I think, will help you never to lie again.

And of course, to remember who you are in Christ. Paul's drawn this all together saying, "There is no divisions in the body of Christ: barbarians, Scythians, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all." And that reminds us of the earliest part of Colossians 1:15-20 speaking of the Lord Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making

peace by the blood of his cross." If you are a believer, you are in him. You died with him, were buried with him, raised with him and will be with him forever.

We do become like what we treasure. It will show on our faces and it will show in our souls. The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul has exhorted us to treasure our Lord Jesus Christ and become like him by setting our ambitions and our affections in heaven, again, becoming so heavenly minded that we are able to be of earthly good. Our union with Christ enables and requires us to keep our minds on heavenly things, to kill competing desires, and to cast off anger and deceit. Are you looking more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let's pray.